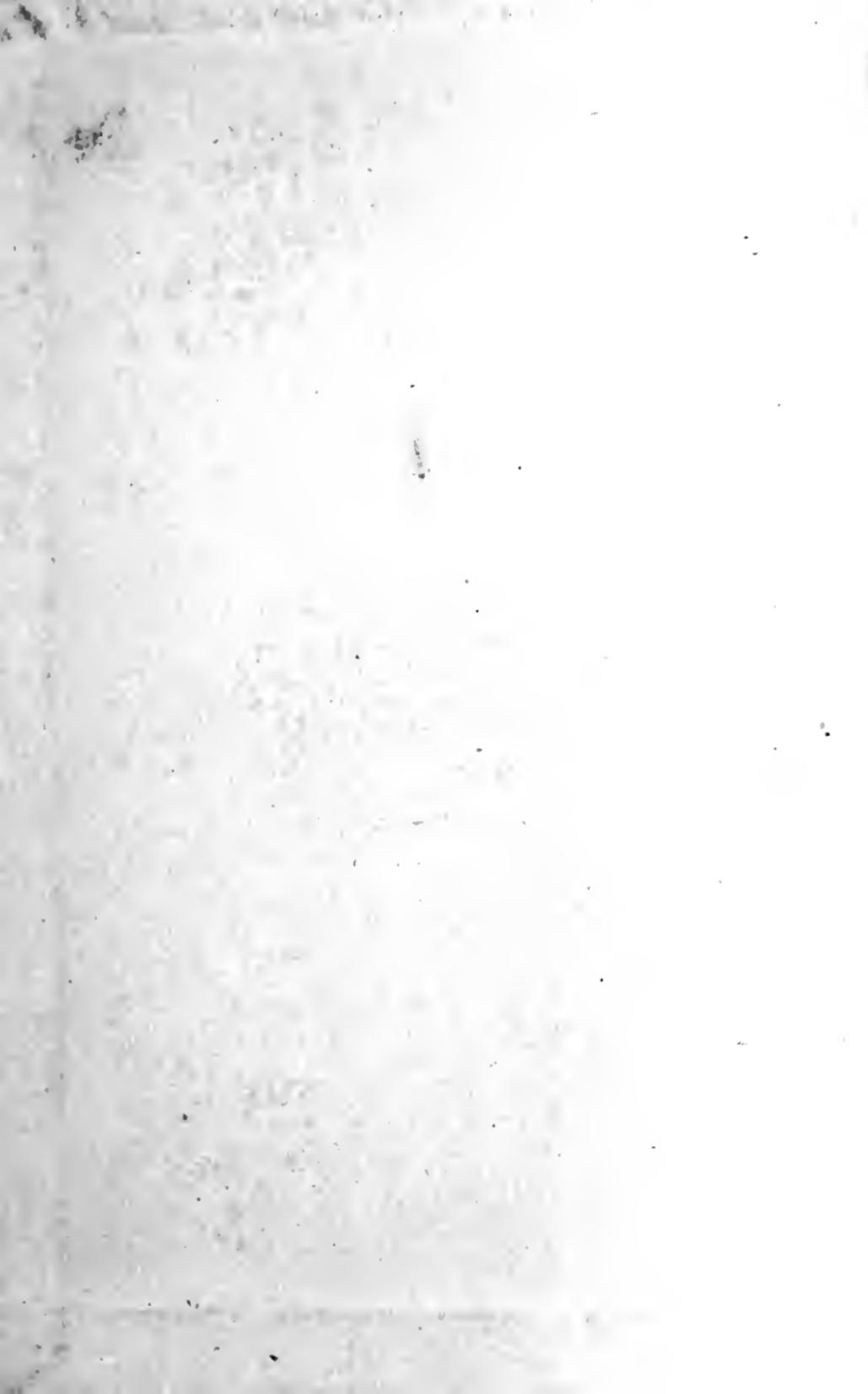


NOTHING ELSE  
MATTERS

WILLIAM SAMUEL JOHNSON

ia



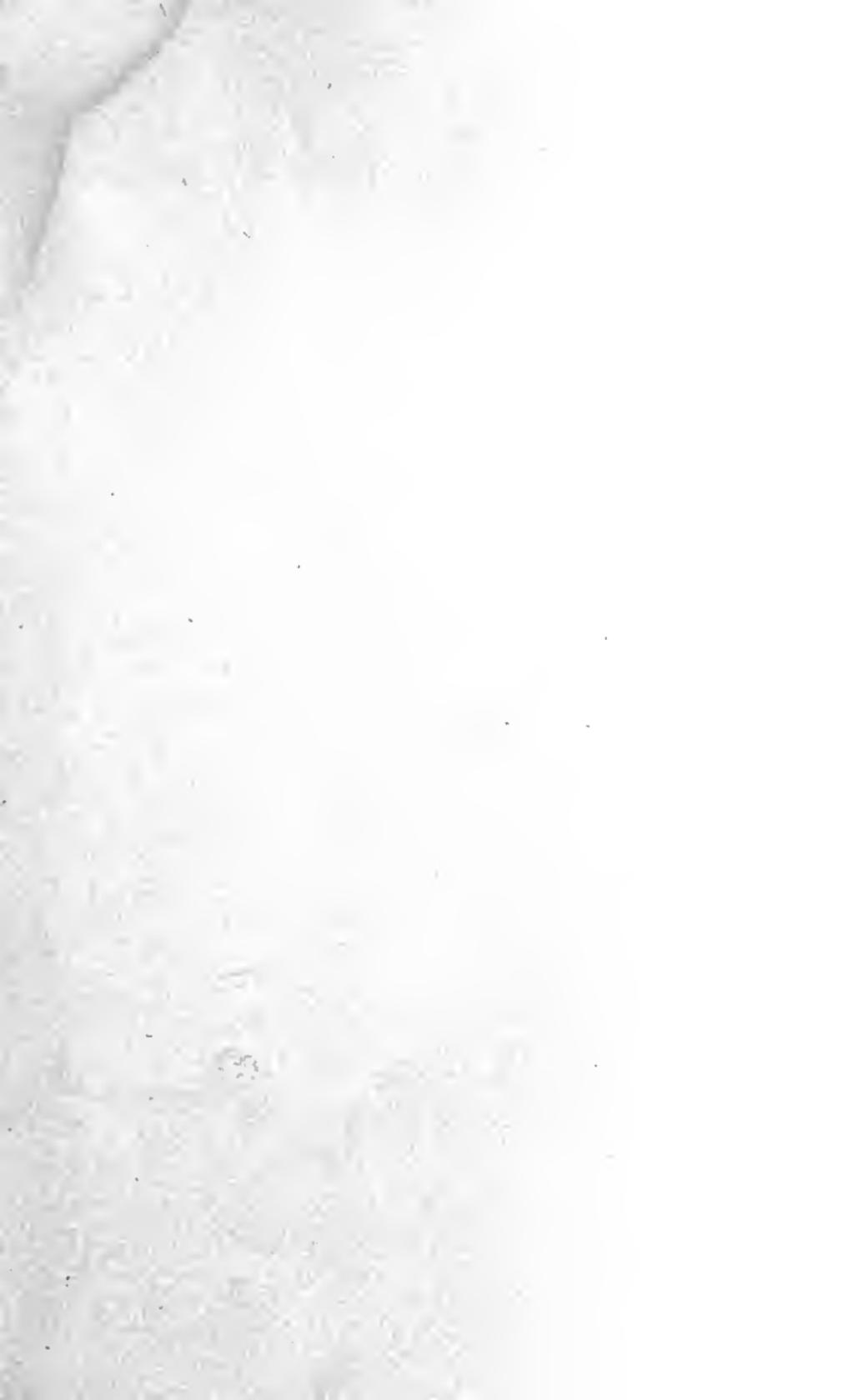
ms  
~~125~~

①

gd  
50

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation





# NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

A NOVEL

BY

WILLIAM SAMUEL JOHNSON

Author of "Glamourie"



NEW YORK

MITCHELL KENNERLEY

MCMXIV

COPYRIGHT 1914 BY  
MITCHELL KENNERLEY

*Printed in America*

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	Prelude	7
I.	Initiation	9
II.	Confidences	26
III.	En Charette	38
IV.	The Book	53
V.	Alchemy	71
VI.	Les Apaches	84
VII.	A Vague Villain	106
VIII.	Love	120
IX.	The Rescue	130
X.	Beamy Jimmy	146
XI.	The Great Interrogation	156
XII.	Vipers' Bites	171
XIII.	Petal by Petal	185
XIV.	Between the Horns	199
XV.	La Brise du Rêve	215
XVI.	Frost Work	223
XVII.	Strategies	231
XVIII.	Veracities	246
XIX.	The Will	262
XX.	Burglary	271
XXI.	Sub Silentio	290
	Postlude	302



## PRELUDE

**Y**OU have asked me, you Five Dear Ones, to record against the forgetful years (still far ahead!) certain Little Adventures, violent, vivid, yet whimsic-strange, that befell us in Paris (ah! the lost Bohème!), colouring the same, at my own proper peril, with certain Little Emotions that ached delicately in mute (but inter-gravitating) hearts.

At my proper peril, forsooth; that should give me pause . . .

Well, I accept the peril (what is a fitting blush more or less against such a tale as ours?) and shall do your bidding. Indeed, it will be sweet to tune the strings of memory into full accord and to beat out thereon such music as I may,—word-music (since that is

## PRELUDE

the craft I live by) that shall clang of happiness to other wistful souls.

Little Adventures; Little Emotions—is there nothing more?

Something more, an it please you——  
Strategics!

You would fain, I think, have the minutest chronicle of that riddling word, though you have been too loving-shy to say so.

The time has come when you may hear all the truth; and that this truth shall have its own colour too (the rose-flush of the Little Emotions aforesaid), I hark back to that lost Bohème and show our united life as it was in the beginning.

# I

## INITIATION

**I**N the beginning I was feeling like a moon-calf. One of the Little Ones, long afterwards, remembered cheerfully my lurid ears.

There was cause! I was standing on one of the brown iron chairs of the Luxembourg Garden in Paris, the pink focus of concentric rings of gamesome faces. The inner ring was formed by the four Little Ones, the outer by a waggish crowd of uninvited Parisians that had gathered to see and redouble my embarrassment. For I was feeling (let me underline the sensation) like a very mooncalf.

“Moreover,” continued Childe Roland, with a sweeping Gallic gesture to me-ward,

## 10 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“he is very beautiful! Observe those waves of jetty hair, that olive skin, those flashing eyes. Look at the modeling of that noble beak! See how Nature, with meticulous thumb, has moulded the spirals of that rosy ear! Admire the Cupid-bow of the lip and the arch of the Olympian eyebrow. Is he not very beautiful?”

“He is very beautiful,” answered the Little Ones, in accents of religious conviction.

The Childe then invited the opinion of the Parisians.

“Is it not that he is enormously beautiful?”

“He is enormously beautiful!” came from the outer rings, an appreciation uttered, so sensitive is the Parisian soul to every nuance of humor, *ore rotundo*.

“He stands six feet,” the Childe proceeded, “he is prodigiously strong, an oarsman, swimmer, athlete, yet gentle as the dodo, now extinct through being gentle over-

much. He garbs himself as one would expect from his vocation (which I shall touch on presently) and I call upon you to admire and applaud those baggy velveteens, those flowing yards of cravat, that romantic barrette."

Confound him! He himself had tricked me out in this absurd fashion.

"Is he not very wonderful?" asked the Child.

"He is very wonderful," replied the Little Ones in an awestruck whisper.

"*Chouette*, is it not?" he asked again.

I did not then understand what "*chouette*," which in the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe means "owl," had to do with me. But the French throng knew that the word symbolized intensest and slangiest approbation.

"He is very *chouette*," whispered the throng.

"And," my expositor went on in a tremendous voice, "for one so recently arrived in

## 12 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Paris, he is rather intelligent. I am sure you all think that he looks fairly intelligent?"

"He looks fairly intelligent," came the guarded response of the Little Ones.

"Is it not that he has the air quite intelligent?"

"He has the air quite intelligent," answered the crowd.

"Moreover," said the Childe, sinking his voice to an impressive bass, "he is a literary chap; yea, even a poet. Honour him, all ye that hear—he is a poet!"

"He is a poet," intoned the Little Ones.

"It is a great poet!" shouted my persecutor.

"It is a great poet," chanted the throng.

"And now, little brother and sisters, knowing something of his qualities, the rare pulchritude of his person, the alpine altitudes of his mind, the—well, taking Hugh Lyddon just as he stands there, blushing on the Pillar of Inspection, is he lowly enough to

share our pride, is he great enough to be a Little One? Speak! Is it Ay or No?"

"Ay!" chorused the Little Ones.

"We may accept him, is it not?"

"Oui!" roared the Parisians.

"Then, Hugh Lyddon, descend from the Pillar of Inspection, and come with me to take the final vow at the Colonne des Baisers."

The Childe put his arm through mine as I stepped down—how gladly—from my chair; and we wandered off together through the blessed alleys of *tilleuls* and *marronniers* that are so dear to the lovers of the Luxembourg. I inhaled a mighty breath, my first real breath of Paris.

"I invented that initiation," said the Childe, with a chuckle of glee; "how did you like it?"

"It was worse than the last you worked on me," I answered—he and I were chums at Yale. "A plague on your inventiveness, and, you little villain, on my preposterous garb."

## 14 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Yet observe, old fellow,” he remarked, “now that you are descended from your derisive height, no one so much as looks at you.”

It was true. I might, for all the note taken of my existence, have been one of the Luxembourg's marble queens, one of its grey tree-trunks, an obstacle to be avoided, nothing more. Nurses, irised with flowing ribbons, *bonnes* with their marketings in dangling nets, black-bloused boys kicking an old tennis ball, brown-legged girls trundling hoops, students, artists, *flâneurs* innumerable, passed me incuriously; some wholly intent on a petty fragment of the world without, some soul-wrapt, I suppose, on the infinities of the world within. And a vast, lonely peace clothed my soul like a perfume, the peace that is found only in deep woodlands, on the deep sea—or in a public park in Paris. The New York of my nativity, electric, dynamic, ceased to flare and clank

in my memory; and—well, I am not ashamed of it—tears came into my eyes.

“Infant,” I said, giving my companion one of his many diminutives. For when Roland Elliot came to Yale, rosy, cherubic and exiguous, he was at once baptised “Childe-Roland-to-the-dark-tower-came Elliot,” a sacrament that, owing to the number of his names and the perfervid ritualism of the priests, became a mere irrigation. And thereafter “Childe,” with or without the dignifying “e,” and a score of infantile derivatives, became his for life.

“Infant,” I said, wiping my eyes, “I am an epitheted fool.”

“Not at all! When we are born, we cry, says Little Will. And you are just born; therefore, like a logical and Shakespearian babe, you cry. So blubber and enjoy yourself.”

“It’s that perfume, I think,” said I, seeking to analyse my absurdity. “What is it, Infant?”

## 16 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

"The pollen of the *tilleul*," he answered; "does it tickle the convolutions of that subtle brain?"

"Something does."

"It also makes, if the subtle brain condescends to such details, an innocuous and insipid tea. But, O trembling neophyte, we draw near to the Column of the Kisses. Make strong your soul!"

"Am I to be kissed?" I inquired anxiously.

"Fear not; no one will kiss you."

"Am I to be pilloried again?"

"No; you will take on you the awful vow and clasp the hands of the Little Ones. That is all; and here we are."

The Colonne des Baisers! may it stand forever, as it stands in my memory, against its shimmering background of leafage and sunlight, a thing of tenderness, motherhood, consolation and triumph over death.

Near it were gathered the Little Ones, to

whom the Childe presented me in the following terms.

“Little One,” he intoned, “known to the large ones of the world without as Aloys Guex-Bény, take the tiny working paw of Hugh Lyddon and pledge him with the holy rune.”

Tall, grey, gaunt and ascetic, a man who, despite his name, bore the race-stamp of New England in his hollow-shaven cheeks and Emerson-like nose and brow, took my hand.

“Little One,” said he, making the high, bleak accents ring like a benediction, “Little One,

“I vow to be true  
To the Power in you  
And the Work you do.”

“Repeat the vow to him, Hugh Lyddon,” commanded the Childe.

I did so.

He then introduced me by the mystic

## 18 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

formula to Elizabeth Brown, who trilled not unmelodiously the R of the northern line as she laughingly repeated the rune.

Then behold our high-priest red and stammering!—until with an evident effort he resumed his extravagant pose.

“What, O Little Hugh, shall I tell you of Betty Brown? That she comes to Paris from ‘those continuous woods where r-r-rolls the Or-r-regon and hear-r-rs no sound save its own r-r-rippling R’s,’ as saith the poet? That she etches? Ay! she etches indeed in a Bettesque manner more whistling than Whistler, a scratch here, the faint adumbration of a scratch there, all deliciously incomprehensible and incomprehensibly delicious.

“But alas!” he continued in tones of trembling emotion, “Betty Brown, I must caution you, splashes daily out of the enameled tub of holy Art into the unformulated ocean of human existence. Robed in sterilized linen, checkered with Philistine blue and white, she tends the sordid sick against whol-

ly inesthetic backgrounds. This grieves the Little Ones; for life, Hugh Lyddon, I need hardly say to you, exists for them only as patches of colour to be peered at with eyes half closed. Patches of colour, Hugh Lyddon, shining through the theatric gauze of the circumambient air. And whether you use a palette-knife, Hugh Lyddon, or a brush, or a burin, or a pen, those air-veiled patches of colour and the cosmic meaning of those patches are all your business as a loyal Little One. Yet, woe is me! This Betty Brown, with whose soul we have laboured in vain, persists in painting with the heretical brush of good deeds on the vibrating canvas of humanity. Betty Brown is a grievous trouble to the Little Ones."

Thus the Childe, beaming with transparent affection on the unconcerned object of his tirade.

"Infant," said she, as he paused, "do you want your ears boxed?"

"Sacrilege!" he cried, "Sacrilege! Would

## 20 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

you lay an impious hand on your hierophant in the very exercise of his sacred functions?"

"I would," remarked Betty, serenely.

"Then," he answered majestically, "lest I be tempted to hurl on your bonny brown head—I mean on your unregenerate soul—the fulminations of my maranatha, I proceed, even I, to pledge my faith to our puny novice."

"I," he said, turning to me, "am the Painter and the last great word of art. I pause, that the import of this pronouncement may trickle into the lyric brain."

"You are indeed the Painter," I assented.

He then took my hand and, with much latent feeling quivering in his voice, rolled forth the rune. Dear old boy! we needed no words to bind our faith faster together.

"Under our awful code," he went on, "none may seal faith with our Mystery till he has sealed faith with me, the hierophant and hierarch. Repeat the rune, Hugh Lyndon, once to the Air—"

“Once to the ghostly air,” repeated Aloys Guex-Bény softly, removing his hat.

“Once to the Book—”

“Once to the Book of the Frost,” said Aloys.

“And once to our unseen playmates, the immortal Little Ones.”

Amid the silence of my comrades, I uttered thrice the rune, and at each pause they cried “Amen!”

“And now,” said the Childe, “let the Mistress of Music, let the Hoar-Frost, let Pruina Guex-Bény, the Priestess of the Book, seal faith with the Little One and all will be accomplished, even unto the uttermost.”

The Hoar-Frost! It was no wintry shape, cold-crisped and glittering, that came to meet me; it was no glacial hand that mine enclosed. I saw, like something in a dream, the mellow sunshine of Paris falling on an earnest face, all sunshine too. I heard, as one follows the sound of one sweet instru-

## 22 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

ment through the tangled perplexities of a symphony, a wood-thrush voice thrilling through the fluttering laughter of children, the music of the dear French tongue and the twittering of the Luxembourg sparrows.

“I vow to be true,” said the voice; but ah! what æons of time between each singing word! It is not only to the drowning man that the past envisages itself. I think that whenever retrospect is threatened with extinction, it awakens suddenly from its placid half-consciousness in the memory, makes its scattered legions one, and rushes united like a single frightened, savage thing to battle for its life.

“To the power in you.”—The power in me?—What power? The dead years storm by and give no comforting answer.—I feel myself drop senseless again in that old Yale shell as she arrows across the winning line.—I sprint round Harvard’s end once more with the ball—ah! the wild play!—clutched hard.—I feel the water slide along my body,

as my rolling stroke, the "Lyddon crawl," shoots me first through the race.—I see reams of scrawled paper, written, rewritten, scratched, interlined, blotted; essays, stories, poems, and visions of fame rising out of them.—I hear old Parr say: "Adhere to literature, Mr. Lyddon—eh, what? You will, I venture to predict—though my prophetic vein is oversanguine at times—eh, what?—You may arrive, Mr. Lyddon—eh, what?" And it all seems so futile, so unutterably *banal*.

"The power in me," forsooth! It is all in the past, that power. And what is it doing, this past with its flamboyant pictures? It is quietly melting away in the little hand that lies in mine; vanishing, like the brute matter of Lucretius, "atom and void, atom and void, into the unseen forever."

And as I watch the hand—I dare not raise my eyes higher—the ghost of that unfruitful past seems to rise and float away, a thin wisp of vapour.

## 24 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Bending tranced over the hand, that gloveless, ringless, confiding hand, I must have looked prodigiously foolish. *N'importe!*—the humblest can pay at least this tribute to truth: to look like a happy fool when he is foolishly happy!

“And the work you do.” Work!—ah, I shall surely work and win—win what? I raise my eyes timidly and meet for the first time the light of hers, those brown-gentlenesses, gold-flecked and peace-giving, the eyes of Pruina.

Then I knew why the past had clashed so plangent through my memory. For there was no past any more forever; and life had become a future, all sunning gold and befriending brown and—is it I that speak, speak for geologic ages?

“I vow to be true  
To the Power in you  
And the Work you do.”

“You are now a Little One,” intoned the Childe; and—some centuries later—I released Pruina’s hand.

## II

### CONFIDENCES

“**C**HILDE,” I murmured, keeping my eyes fixed on the marble lovers of the Fountain of the Médicis—

Paris, once she has bewitched you, lays your heart bare. She forces avowals. The great mother-confessor, she bids you unveil your soul to itself; and her absolutions, uttered with Gallic prodigality of gesture, bring comfort. She is so ancient-wise, that Paris, and so foolish-young, that we are sure she understands. And she bids you tell the secret, so unveiled, to your oldest friend, or in his default to the next child of Paris you meet, to a stray dog, a flower, a tree—or to anything. And if the secret chances to be love!—

“Childe,” said I; and the sunlight, sifted and shaken by the green vibrations overhead, struck up from the water and fluttered warm on the bodies of those marble lovers.

Paris!—the Franks—and “frankness,” which is to be like unto a Frank in Arcadian candour. Therein, surely, is the key to the art of this race, to its passionate self-expression. The key to its literature, too, with its ingenuous, ingratiating egotism. Just the naked heart talking, both. And when one becomes Parisian, lives in the focal point where the refracted rays of that racial Frank frankness meet and burn—why, one melts, willy-nilly. The old Puritan walls round the emotions crumble; the thick scholastic dams round the fluid mind wash away; rheumatic reserves (for our Teutonic reserves are just gout of the soul) become flexible and—why, one talks, willy-nilly.

“Infant,” said I.—Ovid tells the story of those marble lovers and an egregiously dull story it is, to my thinking. Acis and Galatea

## 28 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

they are, cuddling at the foot of a crag, while Polyphemus, huge, bronze, glowering, watches from above—

A dull story; but Paris has drawn it forth from its antiquity, has humanised it, has spiritualised it, has told it over again so tenderly, so nobly, in words of marble, in rhythms of flowing line, in suggestions that reach back to some infinite source of loveliness and love, that the thing becomes Parisian. And the lovers, so transfigured, take the whole universe into their confidence with such an abandon of soul that one fancies it is not sunlight flickering its way through dancing leaves, but the light of some mystic cosmic emotion breaking through the happy souls of living lovers that plays so rapturously over the quivering marble—

“Infant,” I repeated; and this time he awakened from his day-dream and turned on me the eye of attention.

“Childe,” I said; “I have something momentous to tell you.”

“Tell!” he answered gaily, “this is the moment for the momentous.”

“Childe,” I continued; “I am in love.”

To my surprise he became very pale.

“There!” he exclaimed, all the merriment gone from his voice, “I knew that would be the way!”

“But—”

“Of course I’m only a round-faced, unromantic, good-natured little buffoon and all the girls like to have me about; but as for thinking of me as a lover or a husband, why I might as well be the Polichinelle in that show”—he waved a scornful hand in the direction of the Guignol, whose drum was thumping among the distant trees—“might just as well be a wooden Punch and have done with it.”

“But, Infant—”

“And here you come, big and poetic and handsome, and fall in love with the only girl I ever—”

“But, Childe—”

### 30 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Why did you choose her? Why aren’t you a misogynist or a misogynist or any sort of an ’ist that doesn’t want to marry? Why didn’t you become a Catholic priest? Why didn’t you fall in love before you left home? Why did you choose this time and this place and That Girl for your outrageous and disloyal passion? Why—”

“Childe!”

“Why didn’t you choose Pruina? Why out of all the five hundred million women on the earth must you select Betty? Why—”

I seized my foolish little friend and put my hand over his mouth.

“I have chosen Pruina,” I shouted and incautiously removed my hand.

“Why,” he continued, showing no sign of having understood my announcement, “why Betty?”

I corked him up again.

“Infant,” I roared, “I am not in love with your Betty! Do you understand? I am in love with Pruina.”

This time I did not remove the cork till the vintage of comprehension had ripened.

“Do you really mean that you are in love with Pruina Guex-Bény and not with Betty Brown?”

“I do.”

He exhaled his emotion, thereby aiding the bottle metaphor, in a fizzing sigh of content.

“I cannot understand you,” said he.

“Cannot understand what?”

“How, having eyes and ears and a mind and a heart, you prefer Prue to Betty. Why, man, you are the victim of juvenile dementia—”

“You needn’t object.”

“But I do object! I blush with shame at your thrice sodden imbecility. Just look at those girls!”

“*De gustibus non est disputandum,*” said I.

“This is no question *de gustibus*,” he retorted, “it’s a question *de girl-ibus*. Why,

## 32 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

with Betty at your side you would go, you and your poetry, straight to the heart of life. You would be a Tennyson, a Keats."

"But, old man," I suggested, "where would you be while I was taking that personally conducted tour with Miss Elizabeth Brown?"

"I'd be going to the canines," he said dolefully; "but it wouldn't matter."

"It would matter enormously," I protested.

"No," he insisted; "for if you don't win her some other fellow will; and I'd rather be hurt by you than by some chap I've never seen."

"Childe, you are an arrant ass."

"Yes; that's just it; and no woman with any sense of humour—Betty has a delicious sense of humour—wants to be Mrs. Arrant Ass."

"The interrogation point is shaped like a sickle," I remarked.

"What of it?"

"In proper hands it reaps the harvest of truth. Have you ever asked her?"

"Never! and I never shall. In the first place, I'm too poor. My book-plates and illustrations and all that rubbish just bring in enough to feed and clothe me. In the second place, I'm Mr. Punch; just a blithering, blundering joke-monger."

"Infant," I said severely, "you have changed. At Yale you were our Democritus, our laughing philosopher. You evolved a gospel of merriment. For four years you cheered the dear old class; and under your maddest jests we always found something wise and good and human. Even yesterday, in that absurd initiation, I heard here and there an echo of the old Roland Elliot. But today you simply drivel. What the devil has happened to you?"

"Betty," he answered, plaintively, "just Betty."

"Poor old Childe," said I.

"Poor old Childe," sighed he.

### 34 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

And there was a long silence. The sun had found a rift in the leafage and now shone unshadowed on the forms of Acis and Galatea. We looked with eyes of deep self-pity on the divine intimacy of these amorous myths.

"In view of your dolorous state," I said, whereat he sighed again, "considering your love-deleted past, your sombre present and your hopeless future, I have discovered that I am not in love."

"But, my poor old Hugh"—he spoke as from heights of pitying omniscience—"nothing else matters."

"You are a one-sided mope; and several things matter. I shall not fall in love, even with Pruina Guex-Bény. *Apropos*, would there be grounds for hope if I did?"

"Hope is symbolised by an anchor," he answered enigmatically.

"Expound, Orlando."

"And an anchor, put to its *raison d'être*, indicates that the status quo is maintained."

“Unless the anchor drags.”

“Just so. Now, if the status quo is maintained I fear that the ocean of your true love—”

“It is not my true love; the case is hypothetical.”

“All right. I fear, then, that the ocean of hymeneal hypothesis will be non-navigable.”

“Why? Do be less metaphorical.”

“I will be literal. The hypothetical father-in-law, Aloys Guex-Bény, is a great man, an unknown man, to be sure, but a great one.”

“That in itself is no obstacle.”

“He is also a cam.”

“Explain, please.”

“A cam, my poetic friend, is a wheel with a hump on its periphery. It is used in many machines and is no doubt also useful in the great engine of life. The hump on the cam comes round once every revolution and opens a valve, or trips a trigger, or closes a circuit, or—”

## 36 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Get to the point,” I pleaded.

“—or something of the sort. And the hump on the human cam does likewise. It is the law of the machine. It is eternally there. It is always true to its prearranged eccentricity. It is destiny, Hugh; it is destiny. Well, Aloys Guex-Bény, whom I revere and love, is a splendidly lubricated cam with an exceeding large hump.”

“Tell me about it,” I requested.

“No; the subject is rather too metaphysical for Mr. Punch.”

“But how does it affect (this is all hypothetical) Little Pruina?”

“Why, I rather think, my dear boy—I am not sure, of course, but I rather think from little hints that I have gathered during the past two years in Paris—that Pruina is vowed to celibacy.”

“Good Lord,” I exclaimed, adding, on noting his quizzical smile, “—an hypothetical ejaculation.”

“Yes; as a sort of priestess, or pythoness,

or vestal-virgin of her father's cult. In fact, old man, I think that you are wise in your determination not to fall in love with Pruina."

The sun had gone from the marble lovers, leaving them cold and grey above the mirroring water.

I heaved a profound sigh.

"Is wisdom so woebegone?" he asked.

"Actually, I am l'Allegro; by hypothesis, il Penseroso. I am glad to have sailed clear of the doldrums in which you are becalmed; but the ocean looks rather lonely. A man must be in love with someone."

"Poor old Hugh," he said.

"Poor old Infant," said I.

### III

#### EN CHARENTE

**B**OUQUINER!—how precious a thing is the right word! And how desirable a thing when it symbolises an act at once gracious, enticing and touched with grey romance.

Now *bouquiner* means to hunt for old books. That is all. But the very thought of the word raises a ghost in the memory, a vision of those mile-long, stone-paved, poplar-shaded hunting grounds that line the *quais* on the left bank of the Seine.

An old story? Of course!—and a musty, dog-eared, broken-backed, much bethumbed old story at that. But no matter—the glamour clothes it still; no time, no reiteration, no vulgarising, can ever make it trite; and as long as the *quais* guide the old Seine, as

long as books are books, so long will the hunters *bouquiner* and be beatified by the hunting.

I regret that my publishers, in all other respects men that savour the finer essences of literature, should have limited my medium. Ah, the idols of the market!—I am bound by adamantine vows to refrain from rhyme. It is a pity! Song is man's natural speech, his still most potent engine; the infant babbles ma-ma and pa-pa; and the levies march to Valmy roaring the Marseillaise. And then song glides so easily through the hereditary limitations (architectural limitations mostly) of the human soul, glides as the Seine glides between its *quais* and houses and palaces, glides dimpling and swirling, catching up fragments of the universal sunshine and tossing them, like seeds of light, into the misgoverned city of thought.

It is indeed a pity!—for I have written a pretty verse about the book-hunters, the *bouquineurs*. I have put the dear *quais* in

## 40 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

it, just as they are, the square, grey stone parapets with the boxes of books above, boxes of all colours with a prismatic jumble of books within. And the *bouquinistes*, the men and women that sell the books, they are there too; the crippled man with his fat dog, the fat woman with her crippled dog (“*écrasé* three times by *auto-taxis*, *m’sieur*, and not dead yet!”) and many others, dogged and dogless. And the books are there, the blessed things, almost too precious to be named in prose.

What else?—why, the wet wood pavement is there and the smell of it, the vaporous, putrescent smell that is like unto no other for twangling the wires of a Parisian heart. You know, if country-bred, the damp odours of spring woods, odours of fecundity and promise, when you have tramped into their depths to greet the purple spathe of the skunk cabbage and the green spikes of the hellebore; and you know how love, primal and elemental, stirs your being. You know,

if reared 'long-shore, the titillating, salt decay that steams from the oozing flats at low tide, and how it stirs (God knows how!) long dead dreams into a wistful semblance of life. You know, if a New Yorker, how the stink of the old ferryboats blends with the harbor-wash they float on into a perfume that bites to the core of your soul. Well, there is all this and more—how much more!—in the smell of the wet wood-pavement in Paris.

Only rhyme can recall that fragrance.

And this prose is a sorry tool.

Yes; the wood-pavement is in my verse and the man that washes it (no *bouquineur* is he!), the man that sweeps down the gutters, full and flowing rivulets, with rhythmic half-circles of his great besom of twigs. Rhythmic self-expression is permitted to him—he has no publishers!

Further, because it was springtime in my verses, the air about the stalls was white with the fluffy down that carries the seed of the poplars. One can allegorise that poplar-

## 42 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

down in singing verse and hint into it many meanings, very shy-sweet and insubstantial, but now—

Fie on this uninsinuating prose!

There was no poplar-down, however, on the day, my third day in Paris, when Roland Elliot taught me to *bouquiner*. That season had passed.

“Childe,” said I—he was turning over a portfolio of engravings—“I have discovered a treasure.”

“*Bon!* But don’t let the *bouquiniste* observe your rapture.”

“And it is only fifty centimes.”

“Horribly dear,” said he, “you can’t afford it.”

“Ten cents? Of course I can afford it.”

And I put my hand in my pocket.

“What?” cried my little friend, seizing my arm and dragging me away, “would you buy it, at first sight, like that?”

“Of course I would.”

“You huckster!” said he; “you pedlar! you

costermongering cattle-thief of an Autoly-cus! You—”

“What have I done?”

“You crass, green, unenlightened Philistine! You desecrating, recusant, schismatic iconoclast! You would shoot a hare sitting! You would cheat at cards! You would use loaded dice! You would thimblorig! You—” He paused either for lack of breath or further illustrations and then continued solemnly.

“No, my poor Hugh; one does not buy a book the moment it is discovered. One waits!”

“Then someone else may snap it up,” I protested.

“Of course; and that is where the sport comes in. Let me explain. One discovers the book; and a thrill, a glow of bibliophilism, runs through the marrow of the soul. But one doesn't show it. On the contrary, one assumes a fatuous air, almost idiotic, and idly examines his trover from title page to

#### 44 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

colophon. Then, noting its price and its position in the stall, one puts it back and, still fatuous and *dégagé*, picks up another and another. And then one saunters away, *en vrai flâneur*, with that precious book tugging at the heart-strings. Next day, one seeks it again. Will it be there or not? Ah, the delicious torture! One approaches, always *en flâneur*, glancing furtively at the place. The treasure has gone! Horror fills the soul, but not despair. Smiling haggardly, one searches the rows. Joy! it is there; and once again the flame of bibliophilism leaps ecstatic. But does one buy the book? *Jamais de la vie!*—one goes away. And one returns. And one goes away and returns, until the delight and suspense are almost intolerable. And one wakes at night and thinks of the book lying expectant, a padlocked prisoner, in its box on the *quai*, listening to the flow of the river, the rustling of the poplars and the tramp of belated feet. At last! the book too is ready and the time

has come. One goes early to the *quai* on the morrow, to be there when the stalls are unlocked; and, *mon Dieu*, it is raining; the *bouquiniste* will open no box today. And rain next day and the next, and then—”

“And then?” I asked; for a tumult on the other side of the street made him pause.

“One buys the book!” he cried. “But let’s see what the fun is at the School.”

“What School?” I asked.

“L’Ecole des Beaux Arts,” he answered; and we dashed across the street.

“It’s a *charette*,” said the Infant, joyously.

“What do you mean?”

“Those are *charettes*,” he answered, pointing to a row of two-wheeled hand carts drawn up, like a battery, against the edge of the sidewalk. They were laden with huge white drawings, pasted on frames and mounted on dark green paper; and between the carts and the door of the School a crowd of students rushed ant-like to and fro.

## 46 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

What students!—in shirt-sleeves, with flapping pantaloons of brown velveteen; students in blouses, yellow linen reaching to the knees, most filthily and prismatically besmeared; students with long hair, with cropped hair, with faces streaked with ink and colours, with long black beards.

*Quels types!*—and what sweating haste. They dashed with the great drawings from the *charettes* through the open door, to return empty-handed and panting.

Panting? They were all panting; *tout le monde soufflent*.

“The drawings must be in at two o’clock,” explained Roland. “See! the guardian is getting ready to close the grille. The *ateliers* are far away, many of them; and the *charettes* are often pulled a mile on a hard run. *Tiens!* an express *charette*.”

It came down the *quai*, this cart, past Voltaire’s sneering statue, pushed by two shouting maniacs behind, drawn by a student harnessed to leather traces in front. Along-

side galloped a little youth, frowsily bearded, carrying in one hand a pail, in the other a bunch of narrow gilt paper.

“Paste,” explained Roland, indicating the pail. “They could not quite finish; and it’s one minute to two.”

The cart stopped, the drawings were whipped out, and then—paste! Great gobs of it fell on the sidewalk; blouses and velveteens were stickily smeared; and dripping hands were wiped on the tossing black hair of unconscious neighbours. And in thirty seconds the gilt paper was in place and the drawings vanished within.

Not so the little youth with the beard and the paste. He poured what remained into a brown paper bag and approached the door with this bomb concealed behind him.

“Another express!” cried the Childe; but my eyes were filled with the bomb-bearer. He was now near the door, against which leaned a pousy, official-looking man in a blue uniform.

## 48 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“*Guardian des Beaux Arts*,” was advertised by every pose and gesture, “*c’est déjà grand’ chose!*”

He was watching the rush of the belated *charette* with an indulgent smile. His luncheon had touched his puffed face with flushing content; and, *tiens!* what was a minute or so, after all? They should enter, *les enfants*—

It was at this point, if I have read him aright, that the bomb was thrown. Aimed, not at him, but at the wall just above his head, it broke, the clammy, mucilaginous thing, in a white, wet, lumpy shower —

Alas, poor guardian!

There were epic oaths and shoutings and laughter, and the angry clang of the iron grille as it closed behind the dripping official.

“Atelier Lalou, and too late,” said Roland, as the *charette* halted amid frenetic yells. The students ran to the closed grille, beat against it and screamed like lost souls to the

pasty guardian who glowered behind it, Satanic.

All save one. He lay, the lad in the harness, quite still under the *charette* with his blond head in the gutter. The Childe and I pulled him out and laid him on the sidewalk. Chalk-white and unconscious, he became at once then center of a ring of comrades.

"He is an American," shouted the Infant; "it's our affair. Hold his pretty head, Hugh. I'll get brandy."

This elixir is never far to seek in Paris; and presently I was adjusting his head (it merited the Infant's adjective) to the reception of astonishing quantities of *fine champagne*. Half an hour later, he was able to give us his address; and we drove him to his rooms on the Rue de Vaugirard. Once on the sofa in his own den he revived rapidly.

"If I weren't so drunk," he began, "I'd guess riddle."

"What riddle?" I asked.

## 50 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Riddle why Cyril Harley is very drunk,” he explained.

“You fainted from running too hard with Lalou’s *charette*,” said Roland; “and I filled you up with brandy.”

“My name,” remarked the student, after thinking over this observation, “is architecture. What kind of architecture?”

“Doric,” I suggested.

“Ionic,” said he, taking hold of his head, “all volutes at the top. It’s most interesting to be intoxicated—Ionic column, all volutes at the top. What’s little fellow’s name?”

“Roland Elliot,” I answered.

“What’s Roland nickname of?”

“Roland is the nickname for the Childe,” said its owner.

“Childe Roland to the dark tower came,” murmured Cyril, drowsily. “I have something, somewhere in my volutes—a what?—a letter — introduction — Childe Roland — from—someone—old Bill Watson—tomorrow.”

“Yes; tomorrow,” said the Childe; “we will call tomorrow and see how you are.”

Cyril closed his eyes, snored gently, and awoke.

“Other chap?” he said, pointing at me.

“Hugh Lyddon,” answered Roland.

“Stroke,” whispered Cyril; “old drunken Yale stroke—good-night.”

“I am,” he proclaimed, after a short slumber, “an admirable example—inebriated Ionic—proud creator—entirely new—disorder of architecture.”

And he sank into the sleep of fatigue and intoxication.

We stayed in his rooms, dining on what scraps we found, till after midnight, when his regular breathing and pulse assured us that all was well.

“He is a fine fellow that,” said the Infant; “and I shall like him. His taste in books is elegant and catholic; he is poor; he smokes (they are all gone, by the way), cigarettes *paquet jaune à soixante*. And a

## 52 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

friend of old Bill Watson, to boot! He must be an egregiously bully chap."

"But," he added later, in doleful accents, as we sauntered through the deserted streets, "there is a fly in the milk, Hugh."

"What's the matter?"

"I foresee it all. Cyril is clever. Cyril is charming. Cyril is handsome. We shall make him a friend. We shall make him a Little One. And then"—he sighed profoundly—"he will fall in love with Betty."

"No," said I, with a jealous (but purely hypothetical) melancholy in my heart, "he will, of course, fall in love with Pruina."

"With Betty!" he cried, with irritation.

"With Pruina!" I growled; for I had good reason to feel annoyed.

Then silence fell; and we parted at his door in a passing shadow of disagreement.

Idiotic old Infant! Why couldn't he see that it was far better for him that Cyril should love Pruina.

I (by hypothesis) should suffer, not he!

## IV

### THE BOOK

“GREETING to your power, Little One,” said Aloys Guex-Bény, drawing an iron chair across the gravel walk.

“And to your work, *petit*,” I answered, obedient to the letter of our code.

As Aloys adjusted his long, gaunt frame to the inadequate chair, I could not forbear smiling at our diminutives. But there was no trace of amusement on that noble, ascetic face.

“I am glad,” he began, “to find you working, as a true poet should work, under the seven-fingered benediction of the *marronniers* of our Luxembourg.”

“Thank you,” I answered, “that is a sweet and stimulating thought. My work will be the nobler for it.”

## 54 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“No thought of mine,” said he; “only a wayward fancy from the Book. And what is your work?”

“I am sharpening my tools,” said I, “and trying to learn to use them. And the more I try—”

“I know,” he interrupted; “before the Book came I also tried to write. Art is long.”

“I am not impressed by its length, Little Aloys,” I explained; “but rather by its quintessences of refinement. We humans have but five or six simple emotions, some half dozen attractions and repulsions; and to phrase these we have, say, fifteen or twenty thousand words that we can tangle into what complexities we please. And each of these words has its history reaching back to man’s beginnings, its connotations, its special meaning to the man that uses it, besides the reflected colour it gets from neighbouring words and its place in the phrase sequence. Now, with so little to say and so much to say,

it with, I believe that man, for the next thousand years or so, must perfect his tools. Out of the perfected tool will be born the artist to use it; and man, in some far future of self-expression, will be finally self-revealed. That is the goal I work for: the word for the word's sake. And nothing else matters."

He looked at me and shook his head.

"And your reward?" he asked.

"The work," said I.

"Only the work?"

"No," I confessed; "perhaps, years hence, there may come a little poem, a little phrase, something that men will remember when I am dead—something like 'the desire of the moth for the star'—you know, perhaps—"

"I know," said he, with a sympathising smile; "I know. And yet," he hesitated for an instant and then went on, "you are right. A man must obey the call of his own spirit. The word for the word's sake—so be it! But remember that to be a Word-man you must

## 56 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

be also a Thing-man. You must write with granite-grit, with steel-filings, with sap of the leaf, with spume of the sea. Flint and steel!—that's your symbol. For what says the Book? 'The sparks of the Spirit leap from the clash of Things.' "

He was interrupted by the outstretched hand, the dingy shawl and the smile of wrinkled content that receive the rental of the chairs. When we had each paid our ten centimes, Aloys folded his yellow check and put it in his buttonhole.

"The only order I shall ever wear," said he. "Two *sous*! and the freedom of a Luxembourg chair for a whole sunny Parisian day. Two *sous* foretaste of heaven, Little One!

"But as to your art," he continued, "be a Thing-man! Hunt for your facts, the flintiest, sharpest, individualest facts you can find, and hammer 'em together. Hammer 'em up and down, right and left, day and night, and let the spirit sparks fall on the

world. That's art, Little One, the highest art there is! Take that Pantheon over there"—he pointed at the great grey dome lifting above the trees—"and clash it against the Brooklyn Bridge. Lord! what a spark you get. Take a king, that helmeted Prussian for example, and pound him against a dry chunk of Daily Bread. More sparks and big ones! Take that priest"—he indicated an evil mouth muttering over a breviary—"and beat him against Pasteur. There's a shower for you! Take any two things that are hard enough and antithetic enough and you can clash out illumination. Antithesis is the discovery of fire!"

"Excellent," I exclaimed. "I shall borrow that idea."

"And shun abstractions," he went on. "The modern world welters in them. They fill men's minds like an opiate vapour, so that the Real looms like a ghost. Remember always the saying of the Book: 'Beware the Word: it is either Thing or Fiend.'"

## 58 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“The Book,” said I. “I wish you would tell me about it. Little Roland told me that you were writing a wonderful book, but would tell me no more.”

“I wish that Little Pruina were here”—my heart stirred with a hypothetical thrill—“for she tells of the Book so lovingly, so daughterly. She has a filial love for it. She has only the Book and me in this world. I have only the Book and her. And when I die, she will go on with the work, that is—”

Aloys paused and a shadow like a pain crossed his face.

“That is—” I prompted.

“That is if she can learn to read it. And it is hard, hard even for me.”

“Pray explain,” I begged. “I have vowed to be true to the work you do; and I long to understand it.”

“To understand it,” he answered slowly, “we must go far back, back to the mingling of the blood in my veins. My father was a Frenchman from the hot Midi, a true Latin

in his emotions and the lucid clarity of his mind. He blended perfect daring with perfect simplicity, the characteristic of France today. France! the nation that discovered radium and still drinks camomile tea!

“That was my father, Little Hugh; radium burning terribly without waste and homely, comforting camomile.

“And he married my mother; married mystic New England in the morbid, dreaming descendant of a dozen Puritan divines.

“I am the son of that union. I am a mystic radium that burns out and up into the spirit-world; and yet, so potent is heredity, I am not indifferent to the camomile of the commonplace.

“I pass over my babyhood, my boyhood. I hungered! that was all. Hungered to know the Thing Itself that lives beyond the range of our paltry senses. I sought and found, what every true modern finds, an eviscerated Bible, fetish creeds, and sterile churches. So I turned from all this (never mind the grop-

ing processes between) and plunged into the vibrations that quiver between the Not-Me without and the Me within.

“And the revelation came—”

Aloys pointed at the pond behind the grey palace built for Marie de Médicis, the pond that lay sparkling below the terrace where we sat.

“There,” he said, “something that we cannot see blows the white veil of yonder fountain into rainbows. The spray drifts far and the children at play laugh as it kisses them. Something touches the limpid blue eye of the water; and it laughs, too, like the eye of a merry maid. Something fills the bright sails of the toy boats; and they rush through the ripples, while their little captains, shouting with joy, dash around the pond to meet them. Something tosses the leaves of that green grove of *plantanes*, brings us the perfume of yonder *parterres* and the pleasant jangle of the Boule’ Miche. What is that something, Little Hugh?”

"The air," I answered.

"The air!" he cried. "The invisible-tangible! We feel its cool in the roof of the mouth, its delicious no-scent in the nostrils. The flame of our life burns in its presence, flickers if it grows rare, dies if it lacks. And what do you call it?"

"The air," I repeated.

"Ay," said Aloys; "so it is called by men. But I call it the most transparent garment of the Spirit of Life, or, if you prefer, its most legible, its most unambiguous incarnation. Man can read its metaphors in its ghostlike mists, its love and anger in zephyr and tempest. Man's prayers and hymns would be dumb without it; and it is the eternal memory, too, of every sound of earth."

"The eternal memory," I repeated, as I tried to grasp his meaning.

"Yes. Perhaps you have read the Ninth Bridgewater Treatise? No? It is by Babage, who invented the calculating machine. He writes that the air 'is one vast library, on

## 62 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

whose pages are forever written all that man has ever said or even whispered. There, in their mutable but unerring characters, mixed with the earliest as well as the latest sighs of mortality, stand forever recorded, vows unredeemed, promises unfulfilled, perpetuating in the united movements of each particle the testimony of man's changeful will.' ”

“Now I understand,” said I; “and it is an illuminating thought.”

“Illuminating, yes,” said Aloys, “or still better, a magnetising thought, one that makes related thoughts cohere and coherent. When I found it, the air ceased to be air; its passions ceased to be mere metaphors of the poets; its life-supporting breath ceased to be oxygen; its memory ceased to be (what it was to Babbagè) waves of eternally circling sound. It became to me, then and forever, an incarnation of deity; and I breathed and breathe the spirit divine.”

Aloys drew in and slowly exhaled a mighty breath.

“So much I had learned,” he continued, “and then I married. For two happy years my wife shared my thoughts and hopes and died in giving birth to Little Pruina. She ought, by the way,” he added parenthetically, “to be passing here presently on her way from the Sorbonne. Well, one hard winter day in New England (it was shortly before Pruina was born), I found my wife staring at a window-pane covered with the white ferns and leafage of the frost. I spoke; she did not hear. I touched her hand; she started and pointed at the window. ‘It writes,’ she whispered, ‘it writes words on the glass.’ I looked, but could see nothing save the <sup>le</sup>frost that grew like a tropical forest turned to ice. ‘That is Jack Frost, darling,’ I said, ‘just old Jack Frost.’ ‘Hush,’ she answered, ‘it is the blessed air and it writes strange words on the glass. And I cannot read them!’ ”

He paused, looking wistfully at the pond, all broken lights under the crisping breeze.

But I knew that the tender eyes saw through their tears only the frosty window of his old New England home. Poor Little Aloys!

“Our baby was born soon after,” he went on, “and my dying wife bade me name it Pruina, the Hoar-frost. ‘I shall read its writing soon,’ she murmured, ‘and many strange books besides, many beautiful books!’ And then she left me—for a little while. Life is eternal; but happily its stages are very short.

“So she died, Little Hugh, but her whisper lived on. Lived on in my soul, and became a shout and a hunger.

“The frost!—she was divinely inspired. It is in truth the writing of the air—the work of the vibrations of that memory discovered by Babbage, of the emotions we use for metaphors, of the life that burns in our rushing blood. The frost writes the book of the air-god!”

“And you have proved it?” I gasped.

“And I have proved it,” he answered, a

ring of conquest in his voice; "proved it in the dry light of the scientific method; proved it by induction and deduction; proved it so that Descartes would accept it, Bacon would admit it, and Mill would use it as an illustration of his famous canons. The thing is sure!"

"I cannot conceive," I began.

"It is absurdly simple," he interrupted. "One zero day, I filled a small room with the steam of a tea-kettle. That is simple, isn't it?"

I admitted so much.

"Then I sat in that room for two hours and shouted 'O' at the top of my voice until the window was covered with frost. And that, too, is simple?"

"Very," said I.

"Then, Little Hugh, I photographed all the panes and compared them. Curve by curve, frond by frond, I compared them and found, as I hoped to find, a recurring shape that was stronger than the others. It was

## 66 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

the phonetic frost-symbol of the long English O!

“Of course, I was months in arriving at this one phonetic. I tried other rooms, oblong, square, high, low. I used glass of various qualities, colours, thicknesses. And the O was always there.

“Then I tried A, in the same rooms, on the same glass. Victory! The O was gone or very rare; and in its place was another symbol, the phonetic of the name-sound of the English A; I had applied, as you see, Mills’ Second Canon, the Method of Difference.”

I invented and uttered a croaking noise intended to cloak ignorance and flaunt acquiescence.

“These two sounds,” he continued, “were now shouted alternately and tested and re-tested in a thousand ways. It took patience, Little One; for, consider, my shoutings battled against the vibrations of the whole life of the air, since it first appeared on earth.

“But I am very, very patient. There are thirty-two elementary sounds in English; and it required years to discover, test and recognise those sounds in the frost writing. Some, aspirate hissings and the like, elude me still. That done, I had to study and re-shape, for my own use, the whole science of phonetics. You see . . .”

Here Aloys enthusiastically lifted himself above my mental range and disappeared in a mist of strange words. I caught “wave-motions” and “pitch-tones” and “phrase-relations,” and, with a feeling of relief, heard much learning as to the complications caused by the nose, mouth and larynx. The larynx, it seems, plays the mischief with phonetics, aided and abetted by the nose. At last he came down to earth with these words:

“And all these obscure elements I had to trace to their frost effects for purposes of elimination. That is, I tried to do so, and with success enough to give me the final proof I sought, the proof of Results. At the

## 68 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

end of seventeen years, I could read the frost!—badly, to be sure, with gaps and guesses innumerable, but—I could read the frost!”

I shook him hard by his thin hand. I could not help it. The man was so big, so earnest, so real, that his discovery (to me who am no scientist) seemed proved. I accept the wireless telegraph with infant credulity and perfect ignorance—why not this?

“I honour and believe you,” I cried. “So this is the Book?”

“Thank you,” he said, nursing his right hand with his left. “May your faith be as strong as your grip. No; this is not the Book, not yet. Alas! I found, when I came to read, little but banalities. Those that shout the loudest, Little One, are not always the worthiest to be remembered—”

I nodded violently.

“—and I got little but roarings, platitudes from the pulpit and demagogics from

the stump. May they melt as the frost melts!"

I acquiesced heartily.

"After three years of such inanities, when I had mastered, at least in part, the alphabet of my frost, a change came. It came here in Paris. I caught a phrase, at rare intervals, big with meaning; and these grew more and more frequent until at last the truth broke into my soul like a rush of wings—the truth that the *air itself*, or that which it embodies, *was writing direct to me!*"

His words beat violently against the generous limits of my credulity; then I enlarged the realm of faith a little (why not?) and silently extended a proselyte hand.

"One finger," he said, smiling, projecting the index; "my old bones fear your young enthusiasms. I am happy, very happy in your belief. Belief!—in a direct, concrete, sense-compelling revelation from the spirit world. Life holds no other promise than this—nothing else matters."

## 70 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Was he right, I wondered? Would man indeed harken unto a effable-ineffable? Would he love—

“See,” said Aloys, looking toward the pond; “it might be her mother twenty years ago. See the light on her warm hair and how she moves, slender and girlish, through that ecstasy of Paris sunshine. All her dear mother, my Pruina.”

As I saw her coming, an entangling hypothesis, a net of “supposes” and “ifs,” caught my soul; and freedom was only obtained by the admission that, in such preposterous circumstances, something else or someone else might matter considerably.

She mounted the white steps, that Pruina, all gold and flush and happy motion, kissed her father and put her soft hand in mine.

“Greeting to your power, Little One,” said she; and her voice, too, seemed wrought of red gold.

“And to your work, *petite!*”

## V

### ALCHEMY

“**T**AKE my chair,” said Aloys to Pruina, “and tell Little Hugh more about the Book. I want to browse awhile along the arcade of the Odéon. You see,” he added, turning an explanatory eye on me, “I try to remember that there are already books in the world.”

“How much have you told him?” asked Pruina.

“All the historic aspect,” he answered, “down to the Book itself. He has the outline; you may add the colour.”

As he descended the terrace steps and moved slowly around the pond, he seemed in that shadowless glare to be walking on sunshine. We saw him stop to look at a baby in

## 72 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

its hooded carriage, stand for a moment in the blown spray of the fountain with his face upturned, and at last disappear around the corner of the brown palace.

“Isn’t it beautiful,” said Pruina, her voice mellow with daughter-love, “to live the life he lives? Nothing seems voiceless to him; and all he hears is refreshing and high.”

“This is my first real talk with him,” I answered; “and I feel as if I had been standing before some gracious fire that burns benevolently without cracking or snapping or wasting. The image is banal, I fear, but it suggests the warm content he has left within me.”

“And isn’t it beautiful, too,” she went on, “to be the daughter of such a man. I share all his thoughts and dreamings, Little Hugh”—she spoke the diminutive with a shy smile that added (by hypothesis) not a little to the glow left by Aloys—“and even try, in my stupid way, to help him piece together

the strange, disordered words he finds in the frost."

Permitting the bee of hypothesis to gather what honey it might, I said to myself confidentially that it was indeed beautiful to be such a daughter.

Ah, but it was! The vital gold of her hair and voice, sunlight playing in both, were distilling into strange quintessences, more precious than the dreamings of an alchemist, in the alembic of my heart. Great is the virtue of an hypothesis!

"And it doesn't matter a bit," she continued, looking at me with her friendly eyes.

Autumnal eyes (the sorry phrase!); eyes of Indian summer, warm and misty, tawny and tender; eyes with the vibrant life of spring and summer behind them. And as they looked at me, another element, I know not what, sank melting with a mist of dizzy vapours in the alembic. Master Alchemist, Little Love, pray be careful of that fragile thing!

## 74 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

"You are not attending," said Pruina.

"Yes, yes," I protested; "I was attending like a tender. I agree with you that it doesn't matter a bit."

"But I hadn't finished my question," said she.

"I know that," I answered volubly, my brain reeling with the fumes aforesaid; "only one thing at a time matters to anybody; and most things matter to nobody; so I took the chance of being right. Besides, a gorgeous acquiescence fits better into the colour-scheme of friendship than a blanched judgment."

"Acquiescences are always pink," commented Pruina severely, "sweety-pink; and I don't like them. Now listen. It doesn't matter a bit, does it, whether the air is writing the Book or not, so long as what the Book says is wonderful and true and helpful?"

"Not a bit," I agreed heartily. "No one who really works, no true artist, whatever his craft, feels that the results are his. He

can train his hand, store his memory, fix his attention, will to work, and put himself into the attitude for work. But that is all; the outcome is none of his. I believe this is true of every grade, from Master Will Shakespeare down to Apprentice Hugh. So it doesn't matter, Miss Pruina—"

She held out her hand.

"A franc, please," said she, "toward the next feast of the Little Ones. You have violated the letter and spirit of the Rule of the Diminutive."

"Guilty," I confessed, paying my fine; "I felt rather shy about it. So it doesn't matter, Little Pruina—"

Her name for the first time! Ah, what a stirring in the alembic as the Hoar-frost melted there!

"—whether Little Aloys is writing the book or only transcribing it. The product in either case is none of his. His greatness, like all human greatness, lies in his transparency. He lets through the Beyond."

## 76 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Her cheeks flushed with pleasure at my poor praise.

O rose-petals! rose-petals! melting in that alchemic brew, what tinted vapours, what vertiginous fragrance, fills the alembic! Have a care, Little Master, have a care!

“Or take the thing simply as a beautiful metaphor,” I continued, when I had somewhat recovered from the rose-petals, “and it is still true.”

“Sermons in stones?” she asked.

“Precisely. The life of the artist is one long search for metaphors, for the concrete expression of the human emotions. If—”

She laughed (another aureate wonder in the alembic!) and pointed behind me. Under the trees, toddling through the flecks of sun on the gravel, was a tiny lad. He carried a wooden spoon as long as his fat little arm; and his infant desires were centered on a new and marvelous application of that spoon. He wanted to scoop up a sparrow! And no Luxembourg sparrow, however plump and

friendly, would allow itself to be scooped. Still, undiscouraged by repeated failure, this great-hearted morsel of a man approached flock after flock of sparrows, scooped gravely, watched their scattering flight with solemn eyes and tottered off with outstretched spoon to the next gathering.

And we laughed together (add that witching "together" to your mysteries, Little Alchemist!) till hunter and spoon had vanished on their quest among the grey tree-trunks.

"If—" prompted Pruina.

"If—but I have forgotten what I was trying to say."

In truth, I was deliciously intoxicated with the perfumed alchemic vapours. Little One, cannot you do your work of transmutation without this disabling inebriety?

"Metaphors—" suggested Pruina.

"If," said I, striving hard to save the remainder of my wits, "if I wanted a metaphor for art, for example, I might take that child

## 78 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

and his wooden spoon. Art, I might say, is the effort to scoop up a sparrow with a wooden spoon; the effort to capture a winged thought with a homely instrument. Look at the greatest picture or statue or poem. It is a failure, of course—”

“Of course,” sighed Pruina. I never before understood the wistful significance of a sigh.

“Of course,” and I also sighed, “yet if the artist has succeeded in hinting the spoon, the effort to scoop and the sparrow, he has (at least I think so) created a work of art. But I fear I’m talking arrant twaddle.”

“It seems quite wise to me,” she said kindly; “and my poor art—I write music, you know—is nothing but spoon and frightened sparrows. I can’t even show how hard I try to scoop.”

She illustrated with an exquisite hand, making (have a care, Sir, I pray!) a swirling, rosy eddy in the crucible.

“Yet for all one’s failures,” said she, her

eyes dreaming out on the colour and happy stir before us, "nothing else seems to matter. It's the affection for the thing that counts."

"It's the love," I assented.

How the alembic boils below the mantling veil of vapour. Oh, the golden glamour, dear Master, the fragrant colour!

"It's the love," said she.

With these words the fumes of the alembic floated upward, pervaded my brain, and I knew that I was marvelously gifted thereby with divine eloquence. A quaint and exquisite vocabulary suddenly swam into my being like a shoal of little fish, darting, playing, leaping through waves of limpid thought.

Words?—it was as if a casket of jewels emptied there had quickened into the petulant, sinuous motions of piscine life. Sapphires interflashing azure understandings; topazes giving gold for gold; rubies close together and blushing aware; shy opals, their red hearts aglow, whispering bashful

## 80 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

chromatics; diamonds, emeralds, crysolites, beryls, hyacinths—all swirled, with prismatic interplay of dainty affection, in my eloquent brain.

For I was about to be very eloquent. Although to a critical and humorous reader the image I have used may suggest a brain like a bowl of goldfish, it brought no such suggestion to me. No! I was surely about to be egregiously eloquent.

The thing was inevitable. Such a polychromatic shoal! All the warm, friendly, intimate words; all the filmy, whispering, hinting ones; all the old chivalric, patrician courtesies; all the yearning, sighing, caressing ideals of the heart.

And such a *mise en scène*! Paris, the very *foyer* of all tenderness and mother of ardent speech; the Gardens where happy lovers wander forever and the leaves of the *marronniers* flutter under the amorous rain of the sunshine; the statues, white against the green, of those great queens that greatly

loved of old; the marble poets on the lawns whose songs environ us; and the aspiring fountain, and the babies, the sparrows, the shoutings and the easy Gallic laughter. Surely, I shall be finely eloquent—*ça va tout seul!*

Love is my theme, love in its whole rosy history from the Garden of Eve to the Garden of Pruina. Immortal lovers of olden time shall come and go therein; and there shall be shepherds with crooks, and rose-wreathed maidens, and myrtles, and noon-day trystings under a great oak, and the pipings of a rustic flute. And there shall be enchantment there and glamourie almost beyond the poor hintings of words; and it shall all say (but ah! how intangibly, ineffably and, of course, altogether hypothetically!) “Pruina, I love you!”

So! All is planned, foreseen, even to the faltering, dying fall of the tender climax. I have only to begin.

I glanced at Pruina. Her eyes were day-

## 82 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

dreaming. I fixed mine on the blue emptiness above the veil of the fountain and began my oration.

“Love is love,” said I.

She did not speak, but moved ever so little. And by the warm Indian Summer in my soul, I knew that she was looking at me kindly.

An instinct of oratorical reserve told me to emphasize my opening words by a thoughtful silence.

I followed that by another silence, tense and expectant—

And by another, veiled and mysterious—

Then I spoke again.

“I wonder,” I remarked, “if the little lad scooped up his sparrow at last.”

“I wonder,” said Pruina.

Another silence, æonian, surcharged with blessedness—

“The best proof of a good talk,” said the voice of Aloys Guex-Bény, “is an unembar-

rassed taciturnity; so I need not ask how you have fared."

"Yes," I answered, "we have talked of the Book and much besides. We have had, as Dr. Johnson used to say, a good talk, Sir."

"The Book," said he; "I must get back to its enigmas."

"And I to my spoon and sparrow," said Pruina.

"And I to my failure," I groaned, tapping my *serviette*. "Futilities, to be continued."

"Health to your power, Little One," they chorused.

"And to your work, *petits*."

So they left me, hand in hand.

But I did not work. That afternoon I wrote the *octave* and the first *tercet* of my sonnet to Love.

It was completed later as follows—

But I forget my pact!—those publishers!

Besides, it doesn't matter. After all, the poem and my emotions are equally hypothetical.

## VI

### LES APACHES

“*VOICI de bons lacets depuis un sou le pair!*”

But the voice proclaiming the impeccable shoe-laces was not the funereal bass monotone of the old blind man that stands (in all weathers, poor fellow) at the gates of the Garden, Eden-gates that he never enters.

For it was a cheerful tenor, the voice, and flagrantly American, the accent. It belonged to Cyril Harley.

Three months had passed since the Childe and I pulled him from under the *charette* and left him, an involuntary Silenus, to the slumber of ebriety.

When he was sober (to save misunderstanding I note that he was always sober),

we found in him all the virtues, and more, that the Infant had foretold. A clever architect and a mighty dreamer, he stirred us by the minglings of his craft and his visions, by the subtleties he read into the grey façades of Paris, by the spiritualities he promised to build into the living church. We could not always follow him, to be sure; for he used a verbal algebra that sometimes defied solution. Roland's quip, "the lad of the stimulating equations," is finely descriptive.

He had that highest art of friendship, the art of seeing only the high-lights of human nature and of making those lights intenser. Dignity grew in his presence. "I always meet him feeling Childe and leave him feeling Roland," said the merry owner of that name.

Despite this gift, perhaps because of this gift, Cyril's Parisian friends were few. His art, his reading and his economies (he was forced to extreme frugality) deprived him of

all comradeship save that of Bohème—and that he shrank from. “A Bohemian mind in a Puritan body; that’s me,” said Cyril, and remained solitary.

Our coming changed all that. We Little Ones found in him a minikin humour, a whimsic bias, that stamped him Ours. Also, we needed his equations in our evening Nurseries.

Those Nurseries! They had in them the piquancy and salience that spring from antithesis. We were Little Ones, yet prattled of great things. We made the infant word clash with the full-grown thought, and lisped and stuttered high philosophies. From the pages of Mother Goose we reached pudgy hands up to Shakespeare, and scaled alps of cold truth in the history of Jack and Jill. The cosmos was tossed from hand to hand as a pink worsted ball; and we heard sphere-music (for Pruina would have it so) in a lullaby. As we compared the dolls of Betty and Roland, Praxiteles trembled and Rodin

grew pale. Nothing human escaped our prying baby curiosity, our nursery metaphors. A common rubber rattle, shaken by the Infant, became the *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes. "Me rattles," said he, at the close of a long discussion, "me rattles; so I guess me is"—an immemorial phraselet.

As we played thus in the kindergarten of truth, Aloys (who could not well ape the baby) beamed on us comprehendingly, letting fall from time to time some words from the great Book, words that always served as the starting point for new chatter, fugitive and gravely gay, on the eternal quest of man or the elusive verities of art. In good sooth, they were something to hear, the epic babblings of our Nurseries!

Plainly we had need of Cyril, both for his word and his craft. We would buy him a box of blocks; and he should build and burble lustily.

And thus it was, in answer to our need, that Cyril stood at the gate of the Garden,

## 88 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

selling shoe-laces to all the world. High Priest Roland had devised a new initiation—

*“Voici de bons lacets depuis un sou le pair!”* chanted Cyril.

“Give me my pair,” said I, handing him a *sou*. “How do you like it?”

“It’s colossal, except for the police. If I’m pinched—the guillotine!—you make three.”

“Three what, Cyril?”

“Three Little Ones. That Roland-thing sends one along every half hour. Miss Brown was the last, a blue-checked angel. And I’ve sold a lot of laces besides. All to girls. Brown-eyed *midinettes*. Scientific problem for you—why do only brown-eyed girls want shoe-laces?”

“But Betty Brown,” I objected, “has the whole sky under her lashes.”

“True, Mr. Poet; but she was sent by the Roland-thing, and not impelled by brown-eyed desire for laces. Say, I like your company, Hugh Lyddon, but—”

“But?”

“Your presence is a restraint on trade. See the brown-eyes coming. *“Voici de bons lacets depuis un sou le pair.”*”

At this hint I left him. An hour and a half later, at the Colonne des Baisers, he was made a Little One.

That evening, to mark the event, we all went to the Opéra Comique (*prix populaire*, of course) to hear Madame Butterfly. All, that is, save Aloys, who was moored at home by the anchor of his fixed idea.

I found him, when I reached the pretty apartment that overlooked the Garden from the rue d' Assas, busy with a cubical complexity of plate glass, a brazen engine he called an air-pump, and an oily, colourless liquid which he introduced to me as sulphuric acid. The air-pump seemed a polished creature; but the aspect of the acid was ungratifying.

I said so.

“Yes,” he answered; “it's the vitriol that

## 90 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

certain *parisiennes* throw into the faces of their successful rivals. It burns and disfigures.”

“I hope it won’t explode,” I said, casting an anxious glance at the disconcerting loveliness of Pruina. Observe the effect of stirring a poet’s love of colour and light with the spoon of hypothesis. Pruina, after three months of comradeship, after all the juvenilities of the Nursery, was still disconcerting. When she appeared, reason became a mist; as she drew near—mirage! Then arose, as in that first morning in the Garden, discord between mind and tongue. My brain was filled with corruscating eloquence — my mouth with *niaiserie*. The Childe often berated me.

“With me, with Cyril,” said he, “you are fairly sane and sometimes rather brilliant. With Pruina your mind wriggles like a pet spaniel.”

“Bully metaphor!” I exclaimed. “I have watched it wriggle with the cold interest of a

scientist. It's just an experiment, you know; besides"—I hurried on to block his protest—"you are a parallel case. Witness your fatuities with Betty Brown. We both should be brayed for fools in a mortar."

"Why a mortar?" said he. "Such asses as we will bray almost anywhere."

This idiocy will show, perhaps, the well-spring of my banality,

"I hope it won't explode."

"No danger," said Aloys. "This is Carré's refrigerating process, which I have adapted to my purposes. You see I put water in here and exhaust the air. That makes the water evaporate. I dry the rarefied air with the acid. That continues the evaporation. This causes cold; and when the temperature is sufficiently reduced frost forms on the glass. *Voilà!*"

"I have sometimes wondered," I remarked, watching (it was more beautiful than any frost) Pruina putting on a pair of new gloves, "how you got frost in Summer.

## 92 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

It is an enchanting process." This referred, perhaps, to Pruina's dainty manipulations.

"Hardly enchanting," he corrected. "Let us say interesting. An interesting process. I might prefer the compression method—"

"The compression method might serve," I said, as Pruina struggled with a tight finger.

"—the method of Perkins, Twining and others, using anhydrous ammonia, methyl chloride and so on. But the machine is large and clumsy—"

"Nothing large or clumsy would do," I agreed heartily.—Pruina must wear fives.

"—and requires considerable power—"

"It does require some power," said I.—It did, rather.

"—and moreover, it would not be practical for traveling."

"Decidedly not." White kid, *glacé*, for traveling indeed!

"Of course," he continued, "these mechanic means are but makeshifts after all. One gets results, to be sure—"

“Yes,” I admitted, as the glove took at last the mould of the perfect hand; “one gets exquisite results.”

“—but the *mise en scène* is not the same. I prefer nature—”

“So do I,” I murmured, watching the eclipse of the red-gold hair by a vapourous scarf.

“—and when we go to Les Avants this winter, I think, even if the writing is the same, that I shall translate it better in the large air with the white peaks above me.”

“I am sure of it, Little Aloys,” I said enthusiastically. “High thoughts should fly in high altitudes.”

Les Avants!—we are going there together, we three, in December; and the vision of snowy summits creates the anomalous emotion of a warm (but hypothetical) glow in my heart. Les Avants!

“I’m ready at last, Little Hugh,” said Pruina. “Do not sit up for me, Little Father; for we may be rather late.”

Rather late—it is a shuddering thought; but had Pruina's prophecy not been fulfilled, this story would not have been written.

Shuddering, indeed!—the poor world left standing, inextinguishably bored, in the Balzacian sands (whereof each grain is ennui) with never a waving oasis of Hypothesis, of Strategics, of the Beamy Jimmy or the Bottle of L'Ombre-qui-passe. *Sapristi!* It is well we were late. True, the malignant shadow of Cadwalader Bent (who even now seems unreal) might still have crossed the path of Cyril, might even have blotted his sunshine forever; but Roland Elliot, lacking the chance that made us late, would not have moved from a gallant deed to a whimsic crime, and thus (to thy undying glory, O Childe!) become the hero of this chronicle.

However that may be, late we were; and it fell thus: After poor Madame Butterfly had ended her sanguinary writhings across the stage (in most lusty voice), we sought forgetfulness of her sufferings in the choco-

late of—(seek not to know the name!) Chocolate, *bien entendu*, was the artless beverage of the Little Ones. Not that the chocolate was artless, albeit with tricky art it brutalized its advent. It came in a huge, dented can, wrought of a dingy metal, smaller above than below, a can that slobbered from a tawny lip and steamed ecstatic. He was stirred, the can, with a decomposing wooden spoon; and one could hear it scrape through the ancient, unctuous layers of suave brown that lined him. Then, when those rare juices were blended, they were poured thickly into the thick white cups; and, on my Little Honour, no god of Olympus or Valhalla ever lipped a nobler brew.

On the tonic of that decoction (and because *taxis* are extravagant and omnibuses are *complets*) the Little Ones must walk home. It chanced, his heroic destiny so ordering it, that Roland led the way with Betty; while Pruina, Cyril and I loitered behind.

The walk, *qua* walk, deserves no record. I was happy, *en hypothèse*, and probably idiotic; but that is my affair. Our talk, *qua* talk, deserves no record either.

The five Little Ones, bracketed as aforesaid, kept in touch until they reached, on the rue des Pyramids, the rue St. Honoré. There they were checked by a caravan of market carts, heaped with carrots, turnips and other comestibles, snailing its slow way to Les Halles. That is to say, three of the five were thus delayed. Roland and Betty managed to "nip through." So he told us afterwards.

The caravan having passed, we proceeded leisurely, until we reached the statue of Jeanne d' Arc. There we began to run. Madly.

There was cause. Betty stood alone in the middle of the rue de Rivoli, shrieking for help in English and French and beckoning frenetic. Cyril and I sprinted first to her, and there became mere pelting continua-

tions of her gestures. These led us to the balustrade and steps that mark the Tuileries station of the Métropolitain.

It was tragi-comic, that sidewalk stage under the lamp light. A slender old man in evening dress lay quite still, his grey head lolling unpleasantly over the curb, his legs wide a-straddle. Another, far from still, lay prone; and on this figure rode the Childe, as if (like a true Little One) he were playing horse. Occasionally when his mount bucked too violently, he pounded its head with the solid cane he was carrying.

"Hugh," he remarked calmly, "if you wouldn't mind taking my place on this broncho, Cyril and I will apply some first aid to the injured."

I took the seat so courteously offered; and, although the Apache became instantly static, his language took on a high voltage. What he said, being relevant only from the side-light it throws on the writer, is omitted because (let us say) of its want of literary

form. Presently, to make him more portable, I rose and, with a knee between his shoulders, tied his wrists behind him with my handkerchief. An old sea-captain once taught me the trick of this; and the Apache, if I understood him, said that it was effectual.

Meanwhile, the Childe and Cyril had arranged the old gentleman in a less tragic attitude, and were trying, under Betty's instructions, to restore him to consciousness. They were interrupted by a cry from Pruina.

"They're coming back," said she.

We started up. Snaking rapidly along the edge of the gardens of the Tuileries came four silhouettes, advancing (observe how the dramatic instinct stirs in the blood of this France) exactly like bravoës on the stage. I felt, mixed with a chuckling amusement, a shadow of the old thrill that preceded the big games.

"Team work!" I shouted. "Down into the Métro, girls! Infant, guard your

broncho! Cyril, cross the street, run under the arcade, and take them in the flank when I get them in play. And we'll rough-house poor old Harvard."

So (take notice, Alma Mater!) I went to battle singing "Boola."

Now for two months past I had been working in the *salle de boxe* of M—, a master of self-defense with the cane. He had said that very morning that I was "already not bad," removing vainglory thereafter by shrewd raps. He had but one theme, into which he eternally modulated—"Keep moving and swing for the legs."

Armed with this advice and my cane of unbreakable *cornouiller*, I charged the dramatic silhouettes. They spread out as I came; and I saw light flash on steel. I drove at their right flank (boola-boola!) the man next the park railings, so that as they closed in Cyril might take them in the rear.

"Keep moving and swing for the legs;"—and I kept moving (boola-boola!) and

## 100 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

swung with all my might (boola!). The unbreakable *cornouiller* hit something and broke; and a man fell, howling. I dashed at the biggest (boola!), tackling low; and we went down together. Lord! but it was like old times!

I fancied for an instant that my Apache was Harvard's quarter-back (beg pardon, old man!) and quite forgot about the knives of his allies.

But Cyril did not forget. I heard a hideous Indian war-whoop and saw another man go down.

The quarter-back became limp; the remaining Apache made a swift-footed escape; and our amusing romp was over.

The quarter-back was secured with Cyril's handkerchief, and his victim (whose crown was cracked) with our combined white ties. The right flank man needed no bonds. M— was right as to "swinging at the legs;" but I advise a heavier *cornouiller*, say two centimetres in diameter.

“They look like horizontal atlantes, mis-called caryatides,” said architectural Cyril, after we had dragged our quarry to the Métro station and arranged them symmetrically.

The comment of the police (lucky that they came no sooner!) took the conventional form.

“*Diables d’Anglais!*” they cried, as they opened the eternal notebook.

“We are not *Anglais*,” said the patriotic Childe, “but *Américains*.”

“*Amérique du Sud?*” queried an *agent*.

“*Non!*” shouted the Childe. “*Citoyens des Etats-Unis!*”

“*Tiens!*” exclaimed the *agent*, pointing to our prey; “but it is altogether like your Roosevelt, *ça*.” And he wrote diligently.

Then we learnt, under the policeman’s questioning, of the genesis of the fray. The heroic Childe, it seemed, on reaching the statue of La Pucelle, had heard a cry and saw two Apaches pounce on an old gentle-

man. Reckless of odds, he had clubbed the villains most unscientifically, until one fell and the other ran for reinforcements. Thus we have a veridical history of the capture of "Le Rouge Cabot" by Childe-Roland-to-the-dark-tower-came Elliot.

At this place, marked by the eclipse of the official note-books, I insert a stage-direction, "Enter the villain." My own whimsey this phrase; not a guide-post to the reader! For albeit I have eyed him, heard him, touched him, traced his malign effects, yet Cadwalader Bent remains for me a filmy phantom, or (in the cant of the critics) unconvincing. I cannot make him real, though he was, Heaven knows, real enough to the Infant.

Even his voice, when I heard it first, was the merest metaphor—a piece of velvet, say, royal purple once, but stained by evil use, faded and old.

"And to whom, fair ladies," said the velvet drawl, "am I to be grateful for the dubious pleasure of being still alive?"

Betty indicated the Childe.

“My plump and exiguous saviour,” continued the voice, “accept my temperate thanks for the undesirable gift of vitality. I am, as you may perhaps find”—and the voice’s owner struggled to his feet—“a man that always pays, some day, somehow, both friends and enemies.”

A sneering white face, like that of some mocking courtier of Louis Seize; the upper lip marked by a small, grey, excessively curled moustache; the eyelids drooping over filmy eyes; the form meagre and graceful—such was the man that took the Childe’s hand.

“I think,” he said, “that I shall mention you favourably in my prayers tonight”—he laughed hissingly. “On what name, my heroic youth, shall I crave blessings at the throne of grace?”

“My name,” said the Infant, “is Richard Elliot. But—I don’t want to be rude, of course—but, if it is quite the same to you,

I'd rather be excused the benefit of your prayers."

The old gentleman hissed approvingly.

"And why?" he asked.

"Not sure of their destination," answered Roland.

"Excellent," murmured the other; "the gods, who are nothing if not ironic, have shaped us for friends. So prove it, subtle Mr. Elliot, by finding a *taxi* and coming home with me. I am, notwithstanding the ministration of these fair and virtuous damsels, to whom"—he bowed with ceremony—"I hereby express my thanks, somewhat shaken."

"You will excuse me," said Roland gravely to the girls, "if I leave you and assist Mr. . . ."

"Mr. Bent, Cadwalader Bent, and your most humble servant," said he.

I heard Cyril, who stood near me, swearing softly and continuously after this, until, one *taxi* having departed with the Childe and the

unconvincing Bent, and two others with the *agents* and the inefficient Apaches, we continued our homeward way.

Then Cyril explained. "Cadwalader Bent is my father's first cousin; and (your little pardon, ladies!) he is a damned rascal. He and I are the only living descendants of my grandfather, John Harley. Rich tea merchant, that grandpa. Said to have souchonged and oolonged himself into a nervous grave. Somehow (I know nothing of law) Cad Bent choused my dear father—sweethearted soul!—out of his share of the tea-leaves. So my father and mother lived and died poor, leaving no treasure but the son that is I. But Cad wasn't after the money alone. Something behind! Mother hinted it once. Some old, devilish hate that made Cad gloat over their poverty and let them know it. I wish," concluded Cyril; and he seemed sincere, "that the Infant had let those comparatively virtuous Apaches rid the world of Cad Bent."

## VII

### A VAGUE VILLAIN

“**E**NTREZ!” said a weary voice when I knocked at a door *au cinquième*, 39 Rue Bonaparte.

It was a bloodshot, unshaven Infant that greeted me, an Infant in an Isabella linen blouse by way of dressing gown, boiling water over a tin spirit lamp for his matutinal coffee.

“Hail hero!” said I.

“Hero indeed—I wish to God that I hadn’t saved that old rascal. What time is it?”

“Nearly noon; and I am come, O valiant Roland, to offer you a luncheon, a small feast of appreciation, at—shall we say Voisins?”

"We shall indeed; but I must shave first, though," he said, dipping a thermometric finger in the hot water.

"You'll be-nose and be-ear yourself, Infant. See your fingers twiddle?"

"I don't blame them. They got to sleep at five. Bent kept me up for nearly three hours, smoking wonderful perfectos and drinking assorted lush."

"He also appreciates—"

"He appreciates nothing," cried Roland, putting soap in a coffee cup. "I never in my life met such a man. Where's my shaving-brush?"

After a long search, he shouted, "I have it," and pulled it out of a shoe.

"That's a memoria technica," he explained. "Just as I was dropping off to sleep last night a new paint-theme came to me, a dainty description of a breeze playing in Betty's hair. So, half asleep, I dropped the brush in the shoe to remind me. Brush suggests hair, you see. Wait, I'll sketch it."

## 108 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“No,” I cried, “you shall not. You are rather hysteric. Your hysteria will get into those impish fingers of yours. I know you, Infant; and I won’t look. Shave!—or no Voisin.”

He prepared the lather.

“And define your Bent,” I added.

“Clever as the devil, Hugh, but with a sort of warp, or twist, or kink in his nature. He jolly well gave me the woolies.”

As his round eyes were all I could see through his fleece of suds the slang was not inept.

“Just a bad man,” I suggested.

“No,” said he, producing, much to my relief, a safety razor; “not just a bad man. Rather a man that likes to be bad, glories in badness and doesn’t believe in goodness.”

“Curious,” I remarked, “for most evil doings disguise themselves as high moralities; witness the Inquisition, the burning of Bruno, the Salem witchcraft, the—”

“Witness your grandmother!” he inter-

rupted, scraping vigorously. "But Cadwalader Bent has no such self-deceptions (scrape). He is a damned (scrape) bad (scrape) man (scrape)! And he knows it!" (Scrape, scrape.) A safety razor, it may not be generally known, makes a potent instrument of accompaniment and emphasis.

"Then Shakespeare is right and I am wrong," said I.

"Not impossible," he agreed dryly; "but why?"

"Because I have always held that Richard's 'I am determined to prove a villain' was false to human nature."

"He probably knew some Elizabethan Bent," said Roland.

"Perhaps. He was, judging from the sonnets, a man of some experience. But what form does Bent's evil take, Infant?"

"A satanic *je ne sais quoi*," he answered, washing his face; "he sneers at everything decent. His rooms in the Boulevard Malesherbes are full of art treasures; and he

mocks at art. His shelves are full of rare books; and he despises literature."

"Beast!"

"Beast," agreed Roland. "La Rochefoucauld seems his only genuine passion. He has the *editio princeps* of 1665 and every French edition since. Or so he said."

"Well, that at least is a worthy affection."

"Not at all," he contradicted; "he loves La Rochefoucauld because of his deification of self. A man, said Cad, who could hold in his hand all the threads of self could play with the world like a puppet show. This was towards the end of our talk and he spoke as if he had my own particular thread round his little finger. Brrr—but I hate that man!"

"But, Childe," I said consolingly, "after all, you need not see him again."

"A constant eye," he said solemnly, taking off his blouse; "I shall have to keep a constant eye on the old sinner. You'll think so too before I finish. Thus far you've only had the bare outline."

As his plump form, the blouse removed, was inadequately attired in a pair of carpet slippers, I could not help saying:

"The bare outline, old man, rather needs training down than filling out. Shall we give up Voisin?"

"*Jamais de la vie!*" he cried, "I was mighty glad of my solidity last night. Besides, that is nothing sillier than a circular man that wants to be an angle and with the angles stand." And he began to dress, adding irrelevantly as he did so, "I washed when I got up."

"Hygienic and polite," I agreed; "moreover, according to Sir Walter, 'the rose is sweetest washed with morning dew.' But continue."

"Well, after an hour of rambling talk (he talks well, the villain), he said suddenly, 'And who was the blue-eyed nurse, Mr. Elliot?'"

"How did he know?" I asked.

"By her touch, he said. And then he asked

## 112 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

me in that satiny, satanic voice of his whether she returned my *penchant* for her."

"He has eyes, your Mephisto."

"But how did he guess?"

"Because you also have eyes, Infant."

"Well?"

"Barometric eyes that show what the weather is in your soul."

"Develop, poetic Hugh! Knowing your college record in physics, I want you to put sail on that metaphor till it wrecks on the reef of ignorance."

"Barometric eyes . . . let me consider. There is, I think, a vacuum somewhere in a barometer, probably on top. Your vacuum, Roland, is also on top."

"Not bad."

"The barometric vacuum is a mere lack of air; the Rolandic vacuum is a mere lack of Betty. How is that for a man that flunked physics and is proud of it?"

"*Chouette!* But go on. I wait the wreck."

“Now when Betty appears she makes halcyon weather in your heart—and—and—your barometric optics—glow with amorous idolatry.”

“Wrecked!—a barometer never glows with amorous idolatry.”

“It must, Infant—such a mercurial temperament! But anyway, jesting apart, it was your eyes that betrayed your secret to the satanic Bent. What did you say?”

“I denied it, of course; and he laughed that hiss-hiss laugh he affects.”

“And then?”

“And then he asked me about the blond youngster, meaning Cyril. His voice changed; he assumed an air of the simplest, heartiest, old-gentlemanly interest. ‘A young architect; ah! the noble career. Poor?—that doesn’t matter; he will work the harder and aim the higher. Industrious? Clever? Virtuous? Excellent!—just what I would wish a boy, if I had one, to be! Well, Hugh, I rather thawed under this

## 114 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

change of manner (he is a clever devil) and told him all I knew about old Cyril. When I finished, Cad leaned back in his chair and hissed like a serpent, 'Cyril Harley!' said he, 'Cyril Harley.' I had not mentioned Cyril's name to him."

"Cyril told me that Cad is his first cousin," I observed, "once removed."

"I wish," cried he violently, "that he were once removed to"—mentioning an obsolescent country that not fifty years ago ranked as a First Class Power and is now reduced to the grade of a mere Buffer State.

"Infant," I said, "permit me to suggest that your profane explosions and alleged *jeux d'esprit* destroy the constructive elements of your tale. I get an uneasy sense that there is a cloudy menace about Cadwalader Bent, but no act or word on which to predicate it. You open a door, roar 'Enter the villain,' and no villain appears."

"That is all I get myself—just a vague fear."

“But, Infant, what did he say or do? You are like certain novelists that laboriously describe the souls of their dramatis personæ, their vices, virtues, *penchants*, springs of action, and never worry about their words or actions afterwards. What did Bent say or do?”

“I can’t remember every blessed word of a three-hour talk, Mr. Realist.”

“Stop!—I am an Idealist, thou slanderer.”

“You would be something with a big I in it,” he retorted. “But whatever you may be, Cadwalader Bent is dangerous in himself and dangerous to Cyril.”

“Search your memory, old man, for little diagnostic facts. You said, for example, that Bent hissed and laughed and repeated Cyril’s name. That’s what I want, little indicative facts.”

“Then be thankful for what you get—ah! that reminds me of something he said about gratitude. ‘You saved my life,’ said Bent,

‘and, therefore, by all the rules you should like me better than I like you.’ ”

“La Rochefoucauld,” I remarked.

“Probably. Then Bent proceeded to contradict his maxim. ‘But in our case,’ said he, ‘I like you better than you like me. Why? Because there is even a sweeter passion than self-esteem—hate! Moreover, you embody an idea that has long been in my mind. You are poor; therefore you can be bought. You are virtuous; therefore will become a hypocrite. You are a loyal friend in poverty; therefore you will become a secret enemy in wealth. You will serve my ends, Roland Elliot; so I like you.’ ”

“What was the reply of Roland Elliot?”

“I got angry and told him that if he were younger I’d punch his head.”

“And he?”

“Hissed, damn him; simply grinned and hissed,” said the Infant, with an emphasis that broke a shoe-string. “There it goes again. I’ll use Cyril’s initiation lace”—

which he proceeded to do—"and, speaking of Cyril, what does 'intestate' mean?"

"*In*, not; *testari*, to make a will," I answered.

"I thought so. Bent remarked that he was worth half a million. His exchequer didn't interest me; so I grunted; and he made about fifty smoke-rings by way of marking time. Then, before I left, he said, 'If I should die intestate Cyril Harley would get that half million.' And hissed. 'But I won't die intestate.' And hissed again.

"It's no use, Infant," said I. "Bent rests nebulous. He's not real. No real villain would confide such things to a perfect stranger. Bent is utterly unconvincing."

"You act as if he were a character in a story. He isn't!—and he's a very real piece of villainy. He's weaving a web, and these sayings of his are threads in it. An infernal web. Why, when we parted, he took me by the hand and said: 'No, Roland Elliot, I shall not die intestate now.' And I heard

## 118 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

that hiss-hiss follow me all the way down stairs till I cried *Cordon!* to the concierge."

"Unconvincing," I grumbled; "but perhaps he will make you his heir."

"Then I'll give the money to Cyril," he said stoutly, adding with a sigh, "and dear Betty."

Poor old Infant; always that fly in the milk!

"And now you see," he concluded, "why I must watch Bent. *Je suis là, moi!* and he shall not hurt Cyril."

And he clapped on his hat fiercely and shook a round white fist Bent-ward.

"Bravo! and may Voisin give you strength for the battle. Personally, though, I am enthusiastic about Bent. We needed him. We were undramatic Little Ones, content with our toys of art and words and thought. Now, it is 'Enter the giant Blunderbore.' By the way, shall you tell Cyril?"

"What do you think?"

“I think not. We’ll make it our affair, the business of Roland and Hugh, limited.”

“Good! It’s our affair,” said the Childe, as he locked his door.

## VIII

### LOVE

“**H**APPY days!” I began—if I could not talk with Pruina I could at least read my own work to her. “Happy days! and, what is so sadly rare, days that were conscious of their own happiness. The eyes of life are presbyopic; youth looks forward to manhood, age looks back to youth, with the same clear vision and the same panting desire. ‘Fulfilment waits there,’ cries the one; ‘Heaven was there,’ croaks the other; and neither sees, because of this focal defect, that heaven and fulfilment, exquisite and vital, are forever dancing together on the indivisible mote we call the present.”

Pruina’s eyes, visioning into the stirring

leafage beyond the Colonne des Baisers, turned for one assenting instant to mine.

“Platitudes?” I continued. “Yes; and of the flattest. And greatly said heretofore by great masters of verse and prose; and ingeniously diluted, with much edifying margin, by watery commentators. But after all, be this said in its behalf, is it not the very flatness of a platitude that makes it so favourite a promenade for indolent or gouty souls? The old sun shines there; the place is much frequented; the atrophied climbing muscles feel no ache; and even a palsied creed, in its bath chair, may continue its *far niente*. There is much repose in a platitude.

“Even the Book—”

“I see,” said Pruina; “you are writing of the present as if it were already auld lang syne.”

“Gold,” I stammered (the sun, that rare old placer-miner, was panning out the treasure of her hair)—“gold glisters brightest in the gray years.”

## 122 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Even the Book itself,” I continued, to avoid further idiocies, “is not all snow peaks. There are levels. *‘The lens of life,’* it says with charming gallicism, *‘is of a dimpleness!’*—a saying that the Little Ones played with merrily in the Nursery. Roland, the rascal, treated the thing lightly. And he our hierophant! ‘Man first sees life,’ he paraphrased, ‘when he notices a dimple.’ I joined the others, of course, in chiding him for his frivolity (I had almost said, profanity) but—”

“But what?” asked Pruina; for I hesitated.

“What follows,” said I, “is irrelevant, a mere personal comment on the Infant’s foolishness.”

In my heart I agreed with him; for Pruina, as well as Betty, has very desirable dimples.

“Pruina,” I read, skipping some lines, “who loves the widest effects of light and colour, saw a misprint, or a misfrost, in the

Book. 'The lens of life (and the real lens of life is art),' she corrected, 'is of a simple-ness.' But the last word was cried down as a hybrid; and I dared not bring Shakespeare to its defense. We permitted no fetich worship. Little Will was of our guild, loved and quoted (as such should ever be) in love and not as authority. Indeed all the gently great or greatly gentle were on our muster-roll; Spinoza (Little Baruch), for example, was there; and there, too, was Elia, the beloved."

"'The lens of life is of a dimpleness,'" said Cyril, "means nothing whatever"; and I, because I was somewhat disconcerted, agreed with Cyril.

"Why were you disconcerted?" asked Pruina.

"By a propinquous glamour," said I, and read on hastily.

"Then Aloys, smiling benignly on our juvenilities, took up the tale. 'Dimpleness means concavity,' said he; 'the lens of life is

## 124 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

concave. Do any of your children know anything of optics?

None knew anything of optics.

“Then I may venture, without fear of scientific contradiction, to expand the metaphor thus. As man looks forward and back through the diminishing lens of life, all seems (as in a Claude Loraine glass) fairer, compacter, more pictorial, than the gross objects within instant touch. The Book states, rather vaguely I confess, a vulgar error. Judging from the lightness of the phrase, I should call it ironic.’ ”

“The Little Ones accepted both exegesis and comment; and their acceptance brings me round again to the commonplace that begins the essay.

“For it is false, this commonplace! Yeasty To-come (fuming with germination) and fusty Has-been (high as an epicure’s game) smell sweeter in your nostrils, do they, Mr. Moralist, than the fugitive whiffs from the garden of the Now? Poor Grown-up!—it

would not be so were you a Little One living on the surface of Paris. No; you would exult (ah! with what innocent exultation) that you were alive, that Paris was alive, and that the filmy Now played like an iridescence between you."

"I love that," said Pruina, with sympathetic underlining of the emotional verb. I bowed my thanks. I also love that.

"I said," my reading continued, "that the Little Ones lived on the surface of Paris. It is a lamping phrase. It lights the Little Ones, their characters, deeds, aspirations, and the angle from which they gazed on life."

"A lamping phrase," echoed that dear Pruina.

"The Englishman," I read on, "makes a religion of anything he likes very much to do; the Frenchman makes an art of it; and the American a business."

"That sounds rather smart," said Pruina doubtfully.

"It is disgustingly smart," I agreed, "but

## 126 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

it is as true as most aphorisms. Listen to its application."

"But the Little Ones made neither a religion, an art nor a business of the things (how many?) that they liked very much to do. They nonchalantly did them; did them gaily, earnestly, always conscious of the aroma of the fragrant Now, always rejoicing in the surface of Paris.

"That shining surface! Below it in the dark ocean no doubt were the slow writhings of evolving life and the petulant leaps of nervous egoism. But we knew nothing, we sea-gulls afloat, of the motions in the deep.

"Or say (to change the image) that we dwelt in the iridescence of a bubble. We played eagerly amid the filmy nothings of the arts, the melodious colour, the informing music, the chiseled phrase, the glowing marble. Played, too, how earnestly! in the rainbow spectrum of human thought, ranging freely from ultra-violet to ultra-red, rays visible and invisible. We recked not of

the hollow fluid sphere we lived on, blown into form by the vague afflatus we called La France.

“Perhaps, had we turned microscopic eyes downwards, we should have seen swarming life, the rod-like bacilli of the law, the whirling rotifera of fashion, political and military microbes and other pathogenic creatures. But we looked not down. The iridescence fulfilled our vision.”

It was not iridescence, though, that fulfilled my vision. It was gold, a warm, breathing, aureate glow which, centered in Pruina, touched the pleasant lawns, the bright *parterres*, the dark bosage and the fluttering tree-tops with the consciousness that *She was there*. Until this moment I had kept the glow off my manuscript by a blind effort of the will; but now—ah! it was striking up through the written words and my eyes drank it in like an opiate. One effort more!

“Yet we sometimes left the surface,” I

## 128 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

read. "Of the breath that filled our bubble we knew something and ever sought to know more. It is an honest breath out of deep lungs, the bourgeois breath of the French people. Garlic?—yes; a little, and good red Bordeaux besides; and all the healthier for it. It smells, too, of the salt sea, the tilled fields and the pines of the Vosges. It is the sustaining breath of France. Puffing the hollow, mobile film of the State (inhabited microscopically as aforesaid) into a perfect sphere, it creates by warm pressure from within the iridescence on the surface without. What wonder if the Little Ones loved this afflatus?"

She is there, beside me, Pruina! Pruina! —Gold! Gold!—Shall I speak now, saying I know not what?—Is it love?—Has it passed from the region of hypothesis?—Shall I speak?—Read, fool, read!

"I should be proud of that image, were it mine," I read; "but alas! it is not mine. 'Life?' inquires the Book, 'Life a bubble?"

'Then catch its opalescence, breathe its breath and — don't get wet!' Adapted to our parochial purposes, it explains the joy of the Little Ones in Paris."

She is there, beside me, Love! Love—  
Nothing hypothetical now.—It is fact, winged  
and lyric, blond in the blond sunshine.—I  
shall speak, forthright, without eloquence,  
saying simply, "Pruina, I love you—"

I turn to her—

I hear a cheery greeting—

There, coming along the walk, was a glint  
of brown and sparkle, checked blue and  
white linen borne on springing steps.

I like Little Betty—

But now—

Absolutely antiseptic!

## IX

### THE RESCUE

“**D**O I interpose between the questing brain and the elusive word?” queried Roland, breaking in on my Garden solitude.

“You come between an egregious ass and his stinking fodder,” I answered in disgust. “Listen, if you please, to this scintillating sunset trope: ‘The sky behind was a grey-blue, as if cigarette smoke had been blown through the bright hair of the tangled clouds.’ What do you think of that?”

“Poor old Hugh! Did you really, in a lucid, waking moment, mix that hogwash?”

“I, or the scribbling devil that possesses me.”

“And whose, if I may venture into the

penetralia of the artistic soul, was the bright hair of your windy metaphor?"

"It was hair in the abstract," I answered evasively. "Do you suppose that Milton was thinking of some girl when he wrote 'the loose train of thy amber-dropping hair'?"

"I do, and also that thou art a liar, O Hugh."

"I am verity incarnate," I answered; "and, to change the subject, I wonder how an ordinary human man ever captures a phrase like that. 'Thy amber-dropping hair!' How did Milton do it?"

"Not by smoking cigarettes in the Luxembourg Garden and dreaming inanities," he said. "No; he went forth into the shouting world; he got in touch with the living concrete. That's what you need, old man, the living concrete. Now, there is nothing so intensely living, so obstinately concrete, as a dog. Hence, logically, you must go to the dogs for salvation."

"Metaphorically?" I asked.

## 132 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Most literally,” he answered. “I, as high priest of the Little Ones, do command thee to expiate thy abominable trope by going (as I am going) to the dogs.”

“Interpret, Mr. Sphinx.”

“I am on my way to see the dogs clipped and washed at the Pont de Solférino. I am fond of dogs.”

I peered steadily at the Childe through the pinched eyelids of just suspicion.

He grew pink.

“Infant,” I said, “thou also art a liar.”

“I love dogs,” said he.

“Where,” I thundered, “is Betty Brown this morning?”

“The dog is the friend of man,” he said, “a most noble creature. Think of Ulysses and Argos. Think of the Seven Sleepers and Katmîr—”

“Think of Punch and Toby,” I interrupted. “Where is Betty Brown this morning?”

‘I am neither prophet nor the son of a prophet.’”

“Is she etching under the Pont Royal?”

“She is generally etching something somewhere when she is not nursing someone somewhere.”

“Don’t you know?”

“Who am I to aspire to know? Knowledge, says Tennyson, is the swallow on the lake. Yet a little bird (not the Tennysonian swallow) has whispered in my ear that if by any chance she should be etching under the Pont Royal, Miss Bright Hair would be with her.”

“Suppose,” I said, pocketing my manuscript, “that we go to the dogs together.”

The Infant bestowed on me the nodding smile of fellow-feeling. Yet he did not know, from me at least, that my affection had passed beyond the stage of hypothesis. Some things are sweeter unspoken. Delicate reservations form a flowering hedge between friendships.

## 134 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

We found the *tondeur* of the Pont de Solférino plying his clippers on the pelt of a morose and diminishing poodle. A patch of felted hair grew on the cobbles of the *quai*, and as it waxed so did that poodle wane in bulk and self-respect. No wonder!—he came to that place of metamorphoses a saucy dog and would depart the ridiculous travesty of a lion. And he knew it. Also he would be washed, washed wriggling in the cold Seine, with soap in his eyes and every circumstance of publicity and indignity. *Pauvre Loulou!*

“There, Mr. Author,” said the Childe, “is an instructive metaphor for you. You are now an honest dog, a rollicking, rat-hunting, bone-burying tike. Suppose you should finish your book; suppose you should find a weak-minded publisher; suppose you should become a best-seller; suppose the publicity man should deem it meet to flaunt your name, your book and your physiognomy in the trolley cars of New York, guarded by a hair restorer on the one side and a breakfast

food on the other; suppose that reading notices, intimate ones, should appear, telling how Hugh Lyddon, author of 'The Pearl and the Swine,' now in its blanky-blankth thousand, always eats with his knife o' Sundays to remind him of his old farm days in New England; suppose—"

"Shut up, old ass," I pleaded.

"Why? When I am discoursing on the sacred theme of literature."

"Literature!" I ejaculated.

"Of course, literature!—the sort that is literally littered all over the public sty. Well, suppose all these supposes, and what becomes of Master Hugh Lyddon? He becomes a tiny caricature of a lion, clipped by the critics, exploited by the publicity man, shivering in the ungenial atmosphere of the market. No more buried bones for him; he must gnaw them in reading-notices. No more rat-huntings, unless he is photographed in the act. He must always be washed, always have soap in his eyes, always—"

## 136 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Childe,” I cried, “you forget that I am a Little One. The diseases you described afflict only the grown-up world.”

He patted my shoulder.

“Pray against temptation,” said he. “But, speaking of Little Ones, I fancy that your weird foreshadowing of the whereabouts of Betty Brown was veridical. I chanced, in looking up the river, to observe two dots of colour near the Pont Royal.”

“I also,” I admitted, “chanced to notice something of the kind. What an occult coincidence!”

“Mysterious! But a thought, the outgrowth of my love of truth and the scientific method, occurs to me. We should examine those dots of colour more proximately.”

“I care not a jot or a tittle for the scientific method,” said I; “but I love truth with the marrow of my soul. Let us approximate, Childe, or in the vernacular draw nigh to yonder chromatic splotches.”

“If distance lends enchantment,” re-

marked Roland, as we descended the steps and walked along the *quai*, "will nearness borrow disenchantment, that's the question? What do you think?"

"The enchantment appears to me to increase; but it may be a subjective delusion. How is it with you?"

"It increases like the force of gravity, inversely as the square of the distance. Extraordinary how one simple law runs through all nature! Now if Sir Isaac Newton and his apple were here—"

"I should find him *de trop*," said I.

"Maybe; but he was a glorious Little One. Greeting to your power, *petites!*"

This to the girls.

"And to your work, *petits*," answered Betty; "though I am grieved"—the words came like an antiseptic spray—"to see no indication of work about either of you. You are simply demoralizing *flâneurs*."

Pruina nodded golden assent.

"Work," said the Infant loftily, address-

## 138 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

ing Pruina, "thrives not only by working. You know what the Bhagavad-Gita says?"

They did not know.

"'He who may behold,'" quoted the Childe, "'as it were, inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise amongst mankind.' Now, Little Hugh and I, simple as we stand before you, have learnt to behold action in inaction."

"And therefore," said Pruina, "you and he—"

"Modesty forbids that I should chase the rabbit of logic into the burrow of vainglory. Suffice it to say that Little Hugh and I were wrapt on high matters; like the gentlemen in Milton, we

"—reasoned high.

"Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate

"Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute;

"And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.' "

"A moment ago," remarked Betty to Pruina, in an awestruck whisper, "they were

only wise among mankind; now they are fallen angels."

"And as such," said the Childe sadly, "unmeet for angelic society. Come, Little Hugh."

He raised his hat with the sweeping gesture of Cyrano, took my arm and led me to the edge of the river.

"But we won't go far," he murmured; "we'll sit here in plain sight and make our backs look as discontented as possible."

"Discontented backs." As we sat on the shelving cobbles, feet almost touching the water, knees drawn up under our chins, I found myself laughing at the phrase.

"Don't laugh," said Roland. "Your whole future may depend on the curve of your backbone. Make it express, as I am doing, a chastened loneliness, an immense yearning. Since you are the highest of vertebrates, make your vertebræ mean unutterable things. Think of the bones of the dinosaur in the Metropolitan Museum and

## 140 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

how his back seems to be carrying an æonian, prehistoric solitude. That's the effect you should aim at. And, speaking of effects, how did I get on this time?"

"Much better. You were almost your natural self. And how did I get on?"

"You did not say a word."

"I did not say a word?"

"Not a single monosyllable, my poor old Hugh. How did you like my Bhagavad?"

"*Chouette!* And I really did not utter a word?"

"Not one; but you looked whole tomes of effable eloquence. What did you think of my Milton?"

"Apt enough; but somewhat *démodé*. Poor old Milton! he has become one huge 'light fantastic toe' nowadays. Such is fame."

"His only claim to Littleoneness," commented the Infant. "Did I phrase my thoughts well?"

"Excellently—to Pruina. You did not speak to Betty."

"I did not speak to Betty?"

"Not the smallest Indo-Germanic root, my poor old Childe."

"What a fool I am!"

"No; what a Little One you are! And, speaking of Little Ones, does love affect grown-ups as ridiculously as it does you and me?"

"I think not," he answered, "their habits of thought protect them from our perturbations. As far as I have observed, they calmly study what they call the Opposite Sex—"

"An undainty phrase!"

"Say rancid!—find someone who is Marriageable—"

"An insipid epithet!"

"Say mawkish! and marry her."

"Ah, they marry her," I repeated, judicially considering this vagary of the grown-up world, "I had not thought of that, at least as it might affect me. I have played

## 142 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

with the hypothesis of love, but not with the hypothesis of marriage. Have you?"

"Never!" he exclaimed, his eyes mere circles of denial. "I have sometimes thought that I should like to kiss the feet of Betty Brown, though I should probably die of the joy of it."

"And I," I confessed, "have sometimes dreamed of kissing a hand; and the mere dream is almost fatal."

"Poor old Hugh."

"Poor old Childe."

At this moment there was a shout from Pruina.

"Hugh! Hugh! Come quickly," she cried.

I went quickly.

"That man," she said, pointing at a retreating figure, "has been annoying us!"

I gave chase, caught the rascal (a mere crumbling wisp of a man) and, because he was too small to thrash, threw him into the Seine. He sank, came up, yelped horribly, whirled off in the eddies, projected his fool-

ish arms with a gurgling cry and sank again.

It was high time to act. I did not want his corpse, a bloated accusation, to reappear in the Morgue. So I splashed in. As the river was low (say two metres fifty at the Pont Royal), the water was fairly clear and I was able to find him soon after his third eclipse. Found, he became a sea-thing all terror and tentacles; and I had to spend more than the usual time under water before his grip relaxed. By the time this happened and I was able to tow him ashore, we had been swept down to the Pont de Solférino, where we were received by the joyous yelpings of the released and naked poodle and the assisting hands of the Little Ones.

I did not see clearly all that followed; but it is described in any treatise on "Aid to the Apparently Drowned." I had only a dizzy vision of the Childe tilting and squeezing the water out of a limp and dripping rascal, and of Betty dragging at an elongated red

tongue with a handkerchief. Such an efficient Bettine! And there was much pumping of arms and kneading of ribs before Pruina (bless her!) came back with the brandy. Then I felt much better, for my part, and admired the rhythmic vigour of the pumping and the kneading, and Betty's unrelaxing grasp of the extruded tongue. I even found breath to cheer them on and to gasp a faint hurrah when they shouted "He is breathing." Just then arrived the men from the "Secours aux Noyés" and an *agent* with his note book. Thus, with the making of the official record (silent as to the rascal's entry into the river) ended the adventure.

"Little Pruina," remarked the Childe, as we wandered homeward, "I trust you now behold, as it were—"

"As it were," repeated Betty; for he was looking at her.

"As it were, inaction in action, and action in inaction."

"As it were," agreed Betty kindly.

I looked at Pruina (ah, love, there is now no hypothesis!) and knocked timidly, my foolish heart keeping time, on the gate of interrogation.

“As it were?” murmured I.

And I heard the golden affirmative, sounding in my ears like a shy, far trumpet of capitulation—

“As it were,” said Pruina, her dear eyes to mine.

## X

### BEAMY JIMMY

R. L. S., in the epilogue to "The Wrecker," writes of "dead leaves from the Bas Bréau." Unconsumed and unmouldered, they gather there year by year, fallen from the great trees that Rousseau loved to paint. Smokers are besought, in politest French, to be watchful over the fiery instruments of their pleasure; and one is sure, as one settles into that couch, that they have been politely watchful from generation to generation.

Upon those leaves, not far from Barbison, near the bearded faces, wrought in enduring bronze, of Millet and Rousseau, nestled the Little Ones—

"This is a true tale," I began, addressing the Five; "and it happened yesterday."

“Watch, gentles all,” murmured the Childe, “for hoary inveracities.”

“True and of yesterday,” I went on, “yet touched with old romance and fraught with a solemn question.”

“Awaken me,” said the Childe, drowsily, “after the arrival and departure of the solemn question.”

“This is a record of art misdirected”—I looked sternly at Roland—“and of love misplaced”—I looked anywhere but at Pruina.

Not at Pruina shimmering like a patch of sunshine on the brown leaves; for on this day of days and in this forest of forests, I shall (so may the loving local gods grant me utterance!) speak unto her soul the Great Affirmative, ask of her heart the Great Interrogation.

“Art is long,” remarked the Infant, wearily, disposing himself to fictive slumber; “you may wake me at love misplaced.”

“The tale,” I continued, “is the ending or continuation, I don’t know which, of our

## 148 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

little adventure with the drowning rascal. While I was writing in my room yesterday morning—”

“He egregiously epics o’ mornings,” chanted the Childe with his eyes closed, “deliriously lyrics at noon, and preciousy proses o’ nights.”

“I was writing in my room,” said I, and stopped. My eyes, despite my inhibition, suddenly rested on Pruina—

Today then, and in our sacred Fontainebleau, I shall win or lose her love forever. Her love! Nothing else matters. My art may become dumb; my force may fail; all the gods and godlings of youth may die—

“The fact,” observed Roland slowly, “that you were writing in your room has at last percolated into every recess of our intelligences.”

“I was writing in my room,” I continued hastily, “when I heard a voice behind me saying: ‘*Bon jour, mon vieux—*’”

If she says no, I shall go away. I shall

not stay and plead, year after year, as many lovers have done, unmanly and unlovely. I shall go away, to India perhaps, and find a mountain cave, an ascetic retreat, where—

“*Bon jour, mon vieux,*” prompted the Childe; “we all know enough French to translate that perspicuous phrase. We await further excitements.”

“Your idiotic comments put me out,” said I. “I swung round and there, sitting quietly on a chair in the exact centre of the room, smiling prodigiously—”

No; not the ascetic life! That were a sorry return to the gods for the privilege of having loved Pruina. I shall do settlement work (whatever that is) on the East Side (wherever that is) and thus live out the lonely remainder of my days. I shall—

“Was my own familiar cat,” said the Childe, “my too familiar cat, addressing me, somewhat to my surprise, in its native tongue. Shall I continue?”

“Shut up, Infant! There, smiling prodig-

## 150 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

iously, was our drowned rascal. I jumped up and grabbed an Indian club; for I thought he had come to knife me. Nothing, as he assured me in a strange jargon, was further from his thoughts. It appeared, as far as I was permitted to understand him, that he was immeasurably *reconnaissant* and affectioned himself strongly to me as the saviour of his life. The incident leading to his immersion seemed to have left no mark on his memory. He wished well to embrace me, and proceeded to do so, *secundum artem*, on both cheeks. It was, if you will forgive the realism, a garlicky rite."

"Lo! the literary aroma!" cried the Infant.

"Then we settled down for a long, long talk, a talk all thee's and thou's and confidences—on his part. He was, it seemed, a burglar by trade, *maître cambrioleur*, and his name for his friends (among whom I was noblest and dearest) was L'Ombre-qui-passe."

"I warned you, gentles all," said the

Childe, "to watch for fanciful mendacities."

"On my Little Honour," I asseverated, "this is all true. Moreover, due to the saving grace of his baptism, he had suffered a change of heart. Like the great Vidocq, he had decided to become detective, *maître mouchard*, and win a second fame in the world of crime. It would be less glorious, but, on the whole, more profitable. He would cut off the oily black curls over his ears, his identifying *rouflaquettes*, and give them to me as a pledge of continuing virtue and eternal amity."

"Proof!" cried the Infant.

"The proof is here," I answered calmly, handing him a greasy packet, "which, once your incredulity is satisfied, may be offered to the *manes* of yonder bearded artists."

"To the ma-nes or the manes?" asked the Incurable.

"Furthermore," I continued, ignoring his atrocity, "he would well to give me, unto me

## 152 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

and my children's children, his nickel-steel *monseigneur*, his famous Jimmy, which he did. Do you believe me?" I asked the Child sternly.

"I do," he answered, as he scooped a grave for the oily curls; "who can resist the capillary attraction of the True?"

"At the touch of Jimmy," I went on, "so my rascal assured me, that fat oyster, the world, would fly open. Though, to do him justice, he counseled me to open the oyster only by lawful means. His friend Hugh, in his judgment, was too large for a *cambricoleur*. Having read me this lesson of practical morality, he assumed an air of mystery and produced a Bottle—"

"May I ne'er want a friend nor a bottle to give him," sang Roland, patting down the earth that covered the *rouflaquettes*.

"A Bottle, containing, quoth my rascal, a potent anæsthetic, or rather hypnotic. An oath was an oath; and he would not disclose its chemistry. However, his beloved one

should have some practical hints. Squirt a few drops through a keyhole, wait five minutes—*et voilà!* One enters to find all the world asleep, smiling out of heavenly dreams and none the worse for the experience (except in material possessions) on awakening.”

“I must analyse that stuff,” said Aloys; “your story is not devoid of interest.”

“Thank you; and so you shall. L’Ombrequi-passe laid stress on the delights of his dream-bottle—”

“It is a natural law,” said Aloys, as if to himself, “that good often springs from and thrives on evil, as the rose roots in the black soil of decay. Your pardon, Little Hugh.”

“He himself, by accident, had inhaled its fumes. *Tiens!* He was at the door of heaven! A squirt through the great keyhole, a wrench of the Jimmy—”

“Be Homeric,” cried Roland; “say the beamy Jimmy.”

“Good; a heave of the beamy Jimmy!

## 154 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

He enters. The angels sleep with the heads under the wings, *en oiseaux*. Saint Peter snores, his golden keys beside him. Golden crowns everywhere. Sceptres and jeweled belts. *Chouette!* Like an endless Rue de la Paix. He assembles all in a colossal sack. He saves himself! He wakes! *Quel horreur!*"

"True or not," said the doubting Cyril, "it is a convincing story."

"I have the beamy Jimmy and the dreamy Bottle for proofs," said I. "Well, that was the end of our serious conversation; for he insisted that we should go to the Lipp and strangle a parrot."

"Strangle a parrot?" inquired Pruina, looking at me with wide disconcerting eyes.

The Childe explained. He often answered when Pruina spoke to me. I often answered when Betty spoke to him.

"Absinthe is green," said he; "so is a parrot. It is a convivial metaphor."

"Did you go?" asked Betty, in tones of antiseptic disapproval.

“On high artistic grounds,” said I, “it is meet that the story of L’Ombre-qui-passe should end with the climax-phrase ‘strangle a parrot.’”

“Your tale,” said Aloys gravely, “suggests a quaint possibility. We live, as we Little Ones believe, in a universe of perfect adjustments. Everything that we need must come to us; nothing that we do not need can come to us. ‘God’s gifts spell futurity,’ says the Book. Now, what, in the name of all the Little Moralities, shall you be expected to do with a burglar’s Jimmy and a burglarious dream-bottle? That is the solemn question.”

I shook my head and sauntered over to commune with the bearded painters. No, Little Aloys; that is not the question! There is another, another, another; and, Love helping me, it shall be asked and answered today.

## XI

### THE GREAT INTERROGATION

**H**ERE then! The Great Interrogation shall have this contrasting background, this grim Gorge d' Apremont, this geologic charnel.

If only the Childe would go!

Pruina, leaning against a knucklebone—for the plateau where we stood was all blanched knucklebones of rocks, uncountable, set in scanty green brake, grey-green heather, with here and there the emphatic note of a charred stump—

Pruina, I say, seated on the heather, leaning against a knucklebone, was busy with her note-book, where crotchets and quavers were scattered by her small white hand across the page, even as, ages ago, yonder boulders

## GREAT INTERROGATION 157

were dotted on the plateau by the great white glacier. At another time I should have been proud of that simile; but now . . .

If only that Infant would go!

“Pruina,” said I, in a voice shakingly prophetic of the Great Interrogation, “what is music?”

She touched the red flower of shy excuse with the finger of silence. Yes; I know what will happen, what will grow out that glacier-drift across her note-book. Some day she will play to me, as we sit in that dear room overlooking the Gardens. She will play with impish fingers that leap madly on the sounding keys, play me divine fancies, make me achingly happy, make me gloriously woe-begone, and say: “That is the Gorge d’Apremont.”

If only that Infant would go!

“Infant,” said I softly, “what is art?”

“Art,” he snapped, sketching-box on his knee, brush waving in the air, “art is this particular moment. Shut up!”

## 158 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Humbled, I followed his eyes. In the gorge below us were more knucklebones, innumerable, neutral-tinted by distance; and on the rise beyond still more, lavender against lilac-green. Living, wistful colours these, that seemed to strive in vain against the bleached, dead boniness of our macabre plateau. And Pruina (Pruina! Pruina!) puts all that into her strange music; and the Infant (if he would only go!) into his wild art. Let me imitate them and turn it into what I am pleased to call literature. It will serve at least to pass the time until (that Infant exorcised) the moment of the Great Interrogation.

A soft bit of heather; a kindly knucklebone; my note-book—*me voilà!*

Betty and Cyril (alas, poor Infant! small marvel that you snapped at me) wander together, occulted for the most part by far, hyacinthian knucklebones. Is there, I wonder, another Interrogation, made beauti-

## GREAT INTERROGATION 159

ful by violet distances, in the Gorge d' Apremont?

Aloys, learned in all that ends in "ic" or "ology," is pursuing an Interrogation of his own among the rocks. I can hear his hammer tap-tapping far away, questioning mysterious knucklebones and hearing stories of their cataclysmic past.

There should be literature in all this, in the heather and bracken, in the trembling amethyst vista of Interrogations, in the Answers moving to us-ward out of music, out of colours, out of æonian stone, out of young, loving human hearts.

Let me see—

"Is life," I wrote, "a question or an answer? Or is it—"

And then Pruina closed her note-book and began to sing, *pianissimo*—

An ascending *roulade* that rose fountain-like and sprayed into clear, sunny drops—then silence.

I rose and sauntered over to the Infant,

## 160 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

who was putting the final touches on his sketch.

I laid a supplicating hand on his arm.

“Dear Childe,” I murmured, as another *roulade* tinkled heavenward, “three is an odd number.”

“Even so,” he mumbled, and began to arrange his sketching-box. There are moments (as I told him by a pat on the shoulder) of sublime comprehension in that dear Infant’s soul.

“Pruina,” said I, “what is music?”

“Music,” answered Roland, rising and strolling away, “is a noise with a good intention behind it. I am going to gather wisdom from Aloys.”

“Then ask him,” said Pruina, “to come here and tell me what music is.”

“Even so,” acquiesced that blessed Infant, prophetic (to my ears) of tactful forgetfulness. He has, as I have noted above, sublime moments.

We were alone—

## GREAT INTERROGATION 161

The moment had come!

“Pruina,” I said; for I must first create an enveloping atmosphere of interrogation, “does this”—with a gesture of affection towards the glimmering knucklebones—“does this come to you as music?”

“No,” she answered, her eyes searching the landscape horizonward, plane by plane, into its remotest lavenders; “no; it comes as blessedness.”

“It comes,” I forced my lips to shape the Great Noun; “it comes as love, Pruina?”

“As the All Love,” she said, gently, “loving Itself through me.”

Then silence fell upon us. “The All Love, loving Itself through her.” The thought is in our pure Spinoza, in our fervent Fichte; but the emotion itself, the practice, the worship, is with me here, alive and glowing, blond in the blond sunshine! The thought, the verbal abstraction, was, of course, no clearer to my understanding; but the quick reality!—somehow the instant consciousness

of this living miracle (for it is no less) removed Pruina, as if she herself had melted into the violet vistas, from the crude regions of interrogation.

I must bring her back.

“And music?” I asked.

“Music?” she repeated thoughtfully; “I don’t quite know. Perhaps—”

“Perhaps?”

“Perhaps it is just my poor way of expressing the love—”

“The love,” I caught at the bright skirts of the passing word, “the love that loves Itself through you.”

“Yes; and when I am making music, with this blessedness in my soul, nothing else seems to matter.”

“Does nothing else really matter, Pruina? There are human sympathies—”

“They fill the days,” said she; “they are unutterably precious. Yet the rare creative moments, when they come, and this”—

## GREAT INTERROGATION 163

she indicated the glimmering distances—  
“this”—

“Is more precious still?” I suggested.

“Yes; don’t you feel it so?”

The time had come! Interrogation was about us, in the air, in my fluttering heart, on her lips.

“Do I feel it so?” I answered slowly. “Not quite. Formerly, my art, my word-weaving, came first; and life, so far as it seemed lovely or love-worthy, was just the warp in my loom. Now, I see the world from another angle, the angle of a Question—”

Tap! Tap!—the little hammer of Aloys rang louder, rang on a nearer knucklebone. Deflect him, ye local gods, from the pathway hitherward!

“A Question,” I went on, “that involves in its answer my relations, my soul’s relations, to this mysterious life of ours. Nothing else matters except this Great Interrogation—”

## 164 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Tap! Tap!—like the philologic Pivert in Chantecler came the intruding hammer. And nearer!—fie on thee, Childe Roland! ingenious friendship should have discovered, for my sake, geologic abnormalities in remote perspective—

“Then,” said Pruina, “the Dilettante has become Philosopher.”

“A Philosopher,” said I, “is a lover of wisdom, whereas I am rather a lover—”

Tap! Tap!—how I execrate science, a science that continuously approximates, pecking the romance out of the young interrogating world. It is almost here, this science, and the uningenious Infant. I must wait!

“A lover,” I concluded, hoping that the seed of a subtle phrase would grow into the tender flower of an expectation, “a lover of the most love-worthy.”

Enter Science. Enter the Infant, secretly shaking at me an apologetic head.

## GREAT INTERROGATION 165

“Little Father,” said Pruina, “what is music?”

“Yes,” said I; “what is music?” Not that I cared for the answer, or for any answer but one.

“Music,” began Aloys, when the Infant bade him wait.

Cyril and Betty, winding through the knucklebones, joined our group. Did I read their faces aright? Was the one still vibrating with the Great Question, the other still radiant with the Great Answer?

I looked at Roland, thinking to read the truth through him. He studied them, that miserable Infant, his round face twitching a little, and then became an hysteric clown.

“Hear ye! Hear ye!” he shouted. “Be it known that Aloys, in the hearing of gods, men and knucklebones, will discourse on music. Give ear, ye heathers; and ye little brackens, hear!”

Cyril and Betty showed the detached interest of intense happiness, the interest

## 166 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

springing from the consciousness that whatever happens is part of the Beatific Now.

I did not like it.

“Music,” began Aloys again, “is our most solemn vibratory experience.”

Roland, sighing gustily, sank into a clump of bracken.

“I do not mean, of course,” continued Aloys, “the so-called programme music, which frankly expresses the earthy, the vernacular emotions. True music is, if you will allow me a rather cryptic phrase, the joy of Space in its own mathematics.”

At this point the Childe groaned in seeming agony and fell prone among the bracken.

“Consider,” Aloys went on, with a smile at the sufferer, “my intelligent listeners—and Little Childe”—a moan of contrition followed this reproof—“consider the joy of mathematics, the threefold joy. First, there is the pleasing combination of your spacial elements, your web of time, extension, motion. Next, there is the detection of the

problem, the thing to be solved, the Great Interrogation.”

“The what?” I asked, startled.

“The Great Interrogation. Third, there is the solution of the problem, the mastery of the mystery. Hence, the threefold joy—the joy of the mixing, the joy of the quest, the joy of power. Is that clear?”

It was clear.

“The next thought-step is more difficult. Suppose the joy you feel in the problem transferred to the problem itself—”

The Childe bellowed aloud.

“Just as when we hear a foolish noise in our ears we attribute a noisy foolishness to the Infant. Forgive me, Little One!”

“Granted,” said the Childe.

“In thus making our joy in the problem reside in the problem itself, we are but extending a daily habit, the habit that makes us call this French sunshine warm, those knucklebones hard, that bracken green.”

We assented.

## 168 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“One thought-step more,” he continued, “and the last within my power. Let us attribute the joy that now resides in the problem itself to the space without which there would be no problem.”

There was a pause. The step was a long one.

“I am standing with reluctant feet,” sighed the Infant.

“Fancy that Space is happy because it is continuously dancing over the Pons Asinorum,” said Cyril.

“Exactly,” said Aloys; “I accept your somewhat lightsome phrasing. Now, let us come back to music. This, too, is mathematics and, therefore, a spatial emotion. It differs from lines and numbers only in that it comes to us through the ear. Music is audible geometry, nothing more; it is aerial Euclid!”

“The air!” exclaimed Pruina; and as she spoke I seemed on a sudden endowed with perfect understanding.

## GREAT INTERROGATION 169

“The air!” echoed Aloys (how understanding dizzied and blurred!), “the air that expresses space and the emotions of space to our ears. Now you know, as far as my poor words will tell you, what music really is. Try to feel it as well as know it. Try to feel that the air itself is glad for its music and that this gladness is, *au fond*, pure mathematics. So much for music. Now, let us plunge into the forest.”

And Aloys, putting the gathering-horn (always carried on the jaunts) to his lips, blew a blast of farewell to the local gods.

The forest!—there among the giant trees and the listening silences shall Answer and Question keep their sacred tryst. Let us seek the forest—

The Childe walks sadly beside me, Cyril and Betty a little apart, and Pruina with her father.

Again the ascending *roulade* that rose fountain-like and sprayed into clear, sunny drops—

## 170 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Aerial Euclid?” Ah, no, dear Aloys; it is Pruina, drawing my soul to Godward and to Loveward. That is music, the only music, for Hugh Lyddon.

## XII

### VIPERS' BITES

**B**AEDEKER, in writing of the Forest of Fontainebleau, remarks that "Those who stray from the beaten path should beware of adders."

The warning itself, pinched into nonpareil, lurks adder-like in the text, ambushed behind distances, dates, italics and stars of appreciation.

In the Guide-Joanne, one reads that although the number of vipers has diminished, it is prudent to wear gaiters to the knees and provide oneself with *acide phénique* or *alcali volatil!*

Now the Little Ones were not gaitered to the knees, nor did they saunter armed with carbolic acid and ammonia through the leafy

## 172 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

romance of Fontainebleau. And as for beaten paths!—a true Little One and a beaten path are antithetical, antipodean, oil and water, and the sedate latter disgustedly vanishes from under the vagrant patterings of the former, leaving them—to quote the warning Guide-Joanne — *en dehors des routes*.

It so befell us now. All tracks had failed; and we wandered, broken into murmuring groups of two, under the great, paternal trees. I was strolling with the Hoar-frost (Pruina! Pruina!), effervescing internally with divine eloquence that was bewitched, on becoming articulate, into ineptest bleatings.

The Great Interrogation played above us in the whispering leaves and refused to incarnate.

Well, we moved side by side under those benignant trees, avoiding (I at least avoided) contact with the other groups that swung like double stars, in orbits of their gravitating affections.

Aloys and Botany (that arid goddess of classification) walked hand in hand, culling swingeing polysyllabics from the shy tactiturnities of the woodland. Man (it is far easier to frame an aphorism than to ask a question) so desires to know that he creates distinctions and calls them knowledge.

Cyril and Betty passed slowly through the checkers of sun and shadow, their heads bowed, their lips moving. They fret me. How can one shape his soul into a Divine Question when his friendship is on the rack? I like Cyril, to be sure, but at that moment I wished him back in his native California. No Cyril was needed in the Little Scheme of Things. Fate and a winsome intertwining of their lives had brought Betty and Roland together; love and his unasking adoration should do the rest. Cyril, *ce sacré* Cyril—his name and an abolishing euthanasia hummed agreeably together in my mind.

Some hundred meters away on a little grey hilltop, we saw that unhappy Infant

## 174 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

sitting alone, hunched against a white boulder. His arms were clasped around his knees. He was a huddled sphere of dejection.

An idea! I would watch the Infant; and on the instant that he un-sphered himself I should blurt forth the Great Interrogation. Nine words would suffice: "Pruina, I love you; will you be my wife?" Thus, unless the Infant became a petrification, I should be forced to speak. Anyhow, the act was on the knees of the gods.

"Poor old Roland," I sighed, suddenly regaining speech.

Now women are generally pleased to mark the sputtering arc-light, the wasting carbons, of male passion. They prove, both the sputter and the waste, the voltage of muliebriety, the dynamic continuity of sex. But Pruina, being not Woman but Herself, was not pleased. She looked at Betty and Cyril, and shook her head—at the spheroidal melancholy of the Childe, and sighed.

"Poor old Infant," said she.

"Poor old Infant," I echoed, my eyes fixed on him; "but what can be done? The question is, is Betty, by any chance, in love with Cyril?"

"I don't know," she answered, slowly. "Sometimes I think she is, and sometimes—but not so often—I think she is not. Girls," she added seriously, "are harder to read than the frost-words."

"And Cyril?" I asked, after a silence devoted to a consideration of the hieroglyphic feminine.

"Of course," said she, "that was clear at their first meeting."

I believed her. How wonderful, how unthinkable to us men are the messages sent over no wire of logic by Truth to woman-kind. We need the palpable line, we males, the insulating glasses, the spaced poles of reason. Our receiving instrument is too gross to record the Hertzian flashes from the All-true.

## 176 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

The Infant stirred a little. He raised a hand to his brow.

“Pruina,” I began, in a cavernous whisper—when he englobed himself anew—“you like Cyril?”

“Yes; I like Cyril; but I love that poor old Infant there.”

Love!—the golden word sang itself into my soul and echoed yodel-like in its empty spaces. Confusing and continuing echoes, these; for there was much abiding emptiness in that soul because of Pruina. It leaped, the word, from wall to wall of that aching, hollow soul of mine and then (because I am a poor little poet, I suppose, and see foolish metaphors in simple things) the golden sound of it became a golden shuttle which left behind it, in its rebounding flights, threads of opal colour. And across that empty soul grew something beautiful—first a web of spider-lines all intertangled—then a gauze, aureate-filmy—then a texture subtly patterned—and then a Picture.

The Picture was not clear at first because the flashing shuttle-word blurred the inner vision. But the weaving ceased at last; the work of the word was done; and I saw!

I saw Pruina, blond in the blond sunlight—

I saw Roland, radiant, standing beside her—

I saw my Little Duty plain before me—

“Hugh,” said Pruina, “what is the matter? You have gone white as ashes. Are you ill?”

“No,” I said, “I have just recovered my health, and”—but my answer was never finished. We heard a shriek from Betty and ran in the direction of the sound, arriving some seconds after the others. Betty lay on the ground, very white, with Cyril supporting her head.

“A viper,” said Aloys, examining the mangled remains of a snake, “*vipera communis*. She has fainted.”

## 178 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

"She is bitten in the ankle," cried Cyril, wildly.

Pruina kneeled and pulled off Betty's stocking.

"There are two tiny holes here," she said, turning to Aloys, "just above the ankle-bone. What ought we to do?"

The Childe threw himself on the ground.

"Let me suck the poison from the wound," said he.

Cyril let Betty's tawny head settle down among the brown leaves, touched the Childe gently on the shoulder and whispered something in his ear.

That poor Infant scrambled to his feet, pale and shaking, while Cyril took his place and reverently, as a votary that kisses a holy relic, put his lips to the slender ankle.

Aloys, while this was happening, was seated on the ground rapidly dissecting the adder by aid of a penknife and a magnifying glass. It made a tragic little picture to me who stood uselessly aloof—Cyril, bent to his

sacred task, the anxious faces of the two girls, that trembling Infant, and the hurried slicings and pickings of our grey, wise Aloys.

At last the latter spoke.

“It is a very old viper,” said he, smiling; “and its poison glands and ducts are dry and harmless. There is no danger to our dear Betty except from the bite *qua* bite. And I fancy that Little Cyril has cured that.”

There followed a cheerful bustle of relief. Betty was soon brought to—a rosy Betty when, her bare foot hidden under her skirt, she heard from Pruina of the drama that was played in her absence; such a damask rose of a Bettine, in fact, toward the end of the recital, that I thought it seemly to withdraw.

Moreover, there were many reasons why I must find that ashen and shaking Infant who had fled on hearing Aloys' words of comfort. There was much to say to him, much to hint, much to prepare him for.

But first to prepare the reader.

Some chemist once explained to me the

## 180 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

method of preparing perfumes; and I stored part of it in my memory as the subject of a metaphor. Rose petals, for example, quoth my chemist, are dropped into some substance (I forget what) and left there. The substance absorbs the perfume of the petals and is then dissolved in spirits. And thus the perfume. This description may not serve the ends of Jülich-Platz or La Rue de la Paix; but it suffices for a metaphor, which is all, in the last analysis, that any science is good for. My chemist then divagated into synthetic perfumes, things, I gathered, insulting to the rose, a mockery to man and useless as tropes.

Now, to develop my metaphor, much had happened to Roland Elliot and more had happened to me since he sat, a globular grief, on his little grey hilltop. And the growth of these happenings was a flower in my soul, a bitter-thorned, viper-rooted, light-shunning, abnormal bloom with a perfume marvelous sweet. And the scented petals of

this flower, so I read the word of fate, I was to drop, petal by petal, into that dear Infant's soul. Unknowing, lost in what he thinks is sorrow (what does he know of sorrow?) he will absorb that perfume; and then, behold! the spirit of love will flow over him; and his poor soul will dissolve into fragrance.

Petal by petal! Courage, Hugh Lyddon! —one stroke at a time and a slow recover pulls one through the hardest race!

After searching some time for Roland, I came on Pruina, reading one of the tiny blue books of the Bibliothèque Nationale.

"Little Hugh," said she, "you told me a little fib just now."

"Which fib?" I asked rather jauntily.

She looked at me gravely.

"That does not sound a bit like you," said she.

"We literary persons," I answered airily, "seldom sound exactly like ourselves. We are merely incarnate rhetorics, books like

men walking. We are *poseurs*; if we seem earnest, serious, good, it is only the expression of some subtlety of technique, some trick of divine art. At one moment we are Allegories or Fables; at another we are Epigrams or Innuendoes. We are Metonymies and Synecdoches (if you know what they are) and most egregious Antitheses. As Lord Hamlet said, believe none of us! We have eyes to see, tongues to express, and a most perplexing, artful, whirling, clicking machine, all levers and cams and springs, between the seeing and the expression. We are rather vain, Little Pruina, and deucedly insincere. Believe none of us! We are prophets of nothing at all, high priests of nothing whatever, that wander through a dotting, believing world darkly veiled in our beautiful technique. Have you seen Roland Elliot?"

"I suppose," remarked Pruina calmly, "that you are playing some Little Game?"

"I am playing no Little Game," I an-

swered solemnly. "I am stating important and undeviating laws of psychology as I find them illustrated in the depths and shallows of my own cryptic soul. Have you seen Roland Elliot?"

"Roland Elliot, as you call him, vanished in that direction."

Blessed be the direction, I thought, that won that identifying sacramental gesture. But the thought, the last of such thoughts, died in silence.

"I thank you," I said. "I go to seek that unhappy Childe and pour the balm of wisdom on the wound of love."

"And I bowed and walked away, very straight and soldierly, feeling shafts of golden interrogation strike just below the shoulder-blades.

Little Game indeed! It is a Great Game that I have set out to play, the hardest a man has ever played, a game worthy a Little One.

## 184 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

And it will last all my life, Pruina, all my lonely life.

But how interesting! Note, for example, as a curious psychologic fact, that I am able to talk naturally and rather eloquently with Pruina since I ceased to love her.

## XIII

### PETAL BY PETAL

**T**HE Infant, when I found him, lay stretched, like the listless author of the *Elegy*, at the foot of a nodding beech.

He greeted me with an elegiac smile, a smile that outpathosed saltiest tears; and when I sat down beside him with a heartening tap on the shoulder, he caught my hand in both of his, gave it a wrenching, shaking grip, and let it fall. My big paw ached afterward, as if his suffering had poisoned it. The chiefest evil of love and friendship is this: that pain becomes contagious.

“You remember,” he said, in the level, sighing voice of despair.

“What shall I remember, old man?”

“Our talk,” said he and became silent.

## 186 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Ah! for a saving modicum of womanly intuition! Lacking that, by male logic and crass eliminations, I arrived by slow stages at the night when Cyril came into our lives, what time the Infant and I parted in waspish contradiction, each testily prophetic of a love to be lost.

"You were wrong," he continued wearily.

"We might both be wrong," I hinted.

"I was right," said he.

"How far right?"

"Absolutely right. Betty is engaged to Cyril."

"That is what he whispered to you?"

"Yes"—the word was like a passing bell.

The time had come to drop my first petal. O thou infestive Childe! thou tristful Roland! what fragrant anodyne shall be thine, what balm in Gilead!

"We might both be right," I said absurdly, just to provoke his answer.

"You were wrong," it came.

I held the petal, the perfumed, curling,

filmy thing, in the fingers of my soul and let it flutter downward.

“I am glad that I was wrong,” said I; “and I am also glad”—an impressive pause—“that you were right.”

He showed no emotion. The petal had fallen too softly.

“I am glad that I was wrong,” I repeated. This stirred him.

“You have reason,” he said. “Suppose that Cyril had loved Pruina—”

“It would have embarrassed my strategics,” said I.

The reader, whether of a turn of mind geometric, psychologic or merely (as I hope) romantic, will be interested to note that this chance word “Strategics” is the exact pivotal centre of this history. True; the unconvincing Bent, the beamy Jimmy, and the dreamy Bottle of L’ Ombre-qui-passe might have shaped the days of the Little Ones into the ordered congruity of a story, but the oriented will, the thrill in the spinal marrow, the

## 188 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

quintessential freakishness of real life would all have been lacking without Strategics. Moreover, the word was needed to give form to my inchoate good intention.

“It would have embarrassed my strategics,” said I.

A dainty petal, this; but it fell unheeded.

“I am also glad,” I said again, “that you were right.”

His poor soul looked out at me through unlighted windows.

“I am too dull to understand,” he sighed.

“I don’t want you to understand, dear Childe,” I said gently, “I want you to feel that there is still fragrance on earth even though your own rose has faded.”

“It is sweet enough to you, no doubt,” he moaned. “You have Pruina.”

I have Pruina!—Infant! Infant!—what do you know of pain?

“I am glad,” I remarked, hoping to wake him by the drumming repetition, “that you were right.”

“You are glad that I was right,” he muttered, repeating the phrase twice or thrice. “Do you mean that you are glad that I can’t have Betty?”

Now was the time for a handful of petals, delivered in a rich casket of words.

“You phrase the thought, or rather you voice my inner feelings, rather infelicitously,” said I. “A spade should not be called a spade when it is used for sublime purposes. The church knows this; and before the altar a coat becomes a chasuble and a *chemise de nuit* a surplice. My gladness is not orthodox gladness, the sort that springs impulsively from a patent good” (this was a petal!) “near at hand” (another!). “No! it is rather the gladness that grows out of the death-enriched, tear-watered soil of present grief” (a petal). “It sees you in your whole life from cradle to crematory—”

“I wish I were in it now,” he interrupted.

“From cradle to crematory,” I went on; “and it marks the gradual convergence of

## 190 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

certain bright lines that move to some shining focal point, the point of your true, lasting happiness" (a petal). "Dear little Betty herself"—he moaned at her name—"may be one of these bright lines, these pleasing tendencies, that lead you to your real destiny" (a petal). "My gladness, you see, is no present joy; it looks far into the future."

"Of course she would love him," said he.

"Far into the future," I repeated; "and it sees you blessed. It sees you moving, year by year, toward the goal of your noble art; and, blond in the blond sunshine, love walks beside you."

This was a golden petal, such as I have seen fall, in the Jardin des Plantes, from a Gloire de Dijon.

"Love is not for me," he said, "any more forever."

"Love comes to all true artists," I proceeded, "in answer to the call of their art.

It may almost be measured in units of the artistic vehicle."

"No more forever," he murmured.

"Love," I insisted stoutly; for the phrase was too pearl-like to be wasted on grunting inattention, "may be accurately measured in units of the artistic vehicle. You painter-folk, for example, have your triad of coloured clays, your blue, your red, your yellow. So your heart, that palette of the emotions, must have its three colours too—its calf-love—who was she, Infant?"

He smiled for the second time, most wearily.

"There has been no one but Betty," said he.

"Its calf-love," I continued unperturbed, "its Betty and Another."

"No other," he sighed.

"With these simple elements he can solve his simple problems, his *genre*, his *nature morte*, his *paysage intime*."

"No other," he repeated; "no other."

“The music-folk,” I went on, “with their diatonic scales, their chromatics, their reeds and strings and brazen complexities, require a long gamut of heart adventures. Witness, in the biographies of musicians, the volume and mutability of their *affaires du cœur*. A misogynist might paint La Joconde; but only the chaste lover of many could write the Fifth Symphony.”

“You are talking rot,” said the Childe.

“Perhaps I was; no matter!

“We writer-folk,” I continued, disregarding his comment, “with our dictionaries of symbols and our incalculable combinations of them, need for our craft an infinity of amatory experiences.”

“You ought to be Sultans of Turkey,” he broke in savagely. I had his attention at last!

“No,” I answered softly; “not if one is a writer and a Little One. He is then like a bee, to employ a thread-worn trope, that gathers the sweetness of a thousand flowers

but leaves the flowers unchanged. The clover is his, the pure passion of an instant; the curved horn of the honeysuckle; and the *tilleul's* myriad blossoms. And if he hovers a while, in ecstasy, over some tender thing standing radiantly blond in the blond sunshine—”

“You said that before.” Truly, I had his attention.

“Blond in the blond sunshine, it is that he finds in it a symbol of the Love he loves, the goal and the grail of his eternal quest. But, aware that it is only a symbol, he buzzes away. It is the honey he wants, not the honey-bearer!”

Lost was the elegiac pose, as the Childe sat up briskly on one of the fantastic roots.

“You seem to me,” he said very slowly, “to be absolutely mad.”

“Was Hamlet mad?” This question, so suggestive of my present spring of action, was a strategic fault. His mind, however, stopped at the literary fact. \_\_\_\_\_

“He was a character in fiction; and his madness was a ruse.”

“We are all, in a certain sense,” said I, shying rapidly from the end of his phrase, “characters in fiction, or play-actors. No man is all himself. He acts, or thinks he acts, before the audience of his own times. Hence, he is never quite what he is, but rather what he wants others to think he is. Now, the great masters of the pen—”

He raised a satiric eyebrow.

“—and even the poor little apprentices like me, stand in fancy as mediators and spokesmen between Abstract Love and the stuttering world. So, for the dear sake of that Abstract, we all, master and apprentice alike, buzz away from the beautiful Concrete, growing so blond in the blond sunshine—”

“I suppose,” he said, “that you are playing some damned Little Game.”

Just Pruina’s words, barring the incandescent adjective!

“I am playing no Little Game,” I replied. “I sought for you because you were unhappy”—he sank back into his former attitude—“and I hoped to bring you comfort by wrenching your mind away from the particular and making it touch the fringes of universal law. Somewhere, dear Roland, somewhere in the universe Love is waiting for you, standing—”

He sat up.

“You will be telling me next,” he jerked, “that there are as good fish—”

“No!” I cried. “I am an artist, Infant, not a fishmonger; and one should never enshrine a possible truth in impossible language.”

“But you mean the same thing!”

“I mean something quite different. A fish caught or a fish missed is just a fish—not a mystic symbol. The proverb, vulgar in form, vulgarises love. The women we love are embodiments of Love itself or (to return to my first metaphor) the vehicles of artistic

## 196 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

emotions. To you they are splendid colours, to me fragrant and perfected phrases. Perhaps (who knows?) some day you may come on some slender, swaying vision, standing so blond in the blond sunshine—”

“You blessed old donkey,” said he, in something like his own cherry voice, “you are absolutely daft; but no doubt you are trying to brace me up. One would think, what with your bees and your phrases, that you were no longer in love with Pruina.”

The time had come! O transcendent petal!

“I am no longer in love with Pruina,” said I.

“What?” he shouted.

“I am no longer in love with Pruina.”

“You are a most egregious ass,” he remarked.

“I am no longer in love with Pruina.”

“Or a most egregious liar.”

“No; merely a man expressing himself faithfully to an old friend in all the sincerity of his artistic consciousness—and conscience.

I have learnt the perfect phrase, gathered the honey, breathed the fragrance—*et voilà!* The hunger of art is satisfied! I leave her standing so—”

“Not again!” he cried. “Of all the cold-blooded brutes! How about her? Eh? How about that lovely girl?”

Thank the strategic gods! The petal had fallen home.

“The flower is indifferent to the bee,” said I.

“You are metaphor-mad,” cried the Infant; and I loved him for the pitying anger in his voice. “You are not a bee, but a man. *Pruina* is not a flower, but—”

“A flower,” said I, “ a delicate flower standing so—”

At this moment the conversation was in danger of losing its savour of art. When the Delphic whisper becomes a shriek, when the *arrière pensée* bleats, art ceases.

Luckily, however, only the beginning of the Infant’s outburst (mostly imprecatory)

## 198 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

was permitted. The rest was lost in the blare of Aloys' horn calling the Little Ones together.

We were the last to reach the place. Cyril and Betty, those demure shakers of hearts, were sitting together on the ground, he illustrating with twigs and pebbles the ground-plan of some ancient temple. And Pruina was standing by her father, one hand snuggling within his arm while the other held the rallying horn.

It was Pruina herself—so cunningly intermeshed are the wheels of Fate—that blew the closing summons.

Summons?—or was it “Taps” played over the grave of a buried passion?

## XIV

### BETWEEN THE HORNS

**M**EMORY is a freakish jade, well worthy to be a Little One. She sits in the twilight corners of our souls stringing rosaries of foolish beads. Values and beauty are nothing to her; she marries whim to whim, which, fingered not-prayerfully by bald psychology, change on a sudden to profoundest Laws of Association.

Hence it is that the blast of Pruina's horn stirs memories of another; a horn sounding far above me from slopes of snow, signal of the bob-sleds starting above Les Avants.

Memory leaves no gap between these blasts. I see Aloys and Pruina, the Infant and Hugh Lyddon, amid the beaches of Fontainebleau, and then in a flash, together

## 200 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

still, amid the hills, my great confederates.

But, notwithstanding the witness of memory, there were many days between the horns, days of beauty, work, mounting passion, hopeless love and strategics. Each of the Little Ones, in that interval, embodied one or more of these things. I, for my part, was simply Strategics!

Happy days? Ah! that is now another matter. "Happiness," trumpets the Book, "is not being happy but doing happily." If that be so, then some of us were happy; and as to the rest—who knows?

Aloys, for example, our calm, wise Aloys, was surely blessed. Day by day the frost grew ever easier to read and its messages ever ghostlier and nobler. We believed in his work, we Little Ones, or we "willed to believe" (which may be the same thing); and in this atmosphere of faith the frost-ferns grew mightily. One day, I remember, he strode up to me in our Gardens, where I was working near the memory-haunted

Colonne des Baisers, waving a photograph of the latest cryptogram. He handed it to me with a reverent gesture, as one might present, blaringly announced, the message of a great king. Indeed, the thing was rarely beautiful. No sinuous dragon writhing out of a curling, crisping sea in some old Chinese painting had ever lovelier opulence of artistic surprises, of curve-themes repeated and embellished and developed into a symphony of fernlike grace. It seemed no work of chance, no whim of crystalization; but rather abstract Expression and abstract Beauty shaped somehow by viewless will out of viewless vapour.

“What does it say?” I asked.

“It says ‘I am,’” he answered; “only those two words, echoed curve by curve and each exquisitely different. I am!”

There were tears in his eyes; I dared to ask no further questions; and he strode away. Beauty is; Love is; and the loving God; and Another—what more does Aloys,

## 202 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

what more does any one of us need to know? Surely he was very happy.

What of Cyril? His love, save as an ally of Strategics, did not interest me. Indeed, even to us who knew of his engagement to Betty, his work seemed to overshadow his love. This no doubt was a matter of externals, of reticent New-Englandism. None of us, unless it was Betty, got below his surface.

But Cyril's work was its own herald. It sprang, in the Gallic idiom, at the eyes. The rewards of the School came to him as of right, rewards not easily won in a nation where art beats hotly in the blood and comes, a precious heritage, to the humblest. We bleak Yankees, who cannot "let ourselves go," who see in beauty rather craftsmanship than emotion, must be content for some centuries, I think, to warm our shivering souls by the glow of alien fires. When Naples, when Sicily, when the despised Calabria, shall have leavened our race with the yeasty

ferment of the south, then, perhaps—who knows?—we may then produce the symphony, the poem, the picture, the temple, of the new Democracy. But Cyril needed no such yeast—he was a Little One!

What of Betty? She lived her sweet, imperturbable, dual life, in sterilized linen and smudged blouse, nursing the sick and etching the copper, a comely and desirable Anomaly. As nurse and artist she had every reason for content; and I have no doubt (except for a timid masculine reservation) that she was placidly happy. How her happiness and goodness can be translated into terms of the Childe's wasting misery, I cannot say; that also is an Anomaly, feminine like herself, but not so comely or desirable.

I used the words "wasting misery" to image the Childe. Betty's placid joy may have provoked the antithesis, which, if not sadly inept, needs expansion.

Perhaps "wasting," nounless and alone,

## 204 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

connotes well enough the filing, grinding, shredding lathe in which he was spinning. It hints at least the bodily story. The cherubic look had gone; the cheek-bones showed, valleyed by grey hollows. No need any more to "train down the bare outline," as I once advised. He fed like an ascetic; and rarely, in those meager days, could he be lured *chez* Lavenue or Voisin. His tailor was far more content with his shape than was I. To be sure, dignity (a negligible quality in a Little One) gained something by this attenuation. "He gets more Roland and less Infant every day," said Cyril. "I can't make it out."

And no one made it out, as far I could note, except Pruina and me. For Pruina and I, under the sway of compelling Strategics, made the Infant a focus of intensest observation.

So his body wasted. That is easy to phrase; but to envisage his mind, his soul, calls for a filmier vehicle. I am only sure of

this, that "misery" is not that magic thing, the right word. Yet it has some warrant. "Grief," says the Book, with surprising modernity, "is only life short-circuited"; and I fancy that the simile (Aloys showed me why) is exact. When the vibrant force flows through the whole system of the soul, brisk bells call, informing sounders click, motors buzz, filaments glow, carbons hum and chuckle, and even stock-tickers (which have little to do with soul) add their impish jargon. But when this sacred vibration circles in some petty round, the poor soul becomes all dumb and actionless, and (like Gloucester's blinded earl) "all dark and comfortless."

Now, although the Childe was short-circuited, yet the intense voltage of his *idée fixe* saved him from cold and inaction. Its forces operated three sub-stations between which his waking existence was divided—his Work, our Nurseries and Cadwalader Bent. And

## 206 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

he showed in each the same hot, leaping energy.

The artistic results of this period, the half year that lay between the horns of Fontainebleau and *Les Avants*, were amazing for quantity and intensity. *Esquisses* and *croquis* fell from him like leaves. He essayed many vehicles; aquarelle, gouache, pastel, oil, charcoal, pencil and flagrant marriages of these materials—he used them all. He groped, wandered, created, destroyed, for some four months; and then, on a sudden, in one hectic week (when I was denied his studio) he painted *Les Ailes Rognées*. The world knows the picture now through the crude publicities of popular art, knows at least something of its austere loveliness. But the world cannot grasp, indeed not even all the Little Ones could grasp, the *contents* of that beauty. “It makes one’s soul ache,” I heard a *précieuse* say, “to see Love clip off those lovely opalescent wings. I wonder why he does it!”

This book, madame, tells why!

But in our Nurseries the Childe showed none of the fever of the studio. There he was his old self and more, frolic, rattling, *folâtre*. In one thing only had he changed: he could talk to Betty! No stammering now; no pink-faced idiocies. I do not know whether the others noticed this fact; but it was shouted at me because of a parallel prodigy: I could talk to Pruina! These hand in hand phenomena are curious, I think, and well worth the analysis of psychology. Their causes, without tracing the intermediate processes, were obviously the same—love was honourably or diplomatically suppressed. But (to add something more to the data of psychology) the identity of the glib results was independent of motive. His was the happiness (dear old Infant!) of Betty and Cyril. Mine was simply Strategies. I used to wonder at times if, when I had played my Little Game to the end, when Roland opened his eyes and saw

## 208 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Pruina as she really was, he would be stricken dumb before her. I hoped so; his silence would be a triumphant song to me, a pæan of Strategics.

The recurrence of the word reminds me of the third substation of the Infant's activities—Cadwalader Bent. Possessed by the shadowy fear of some vague evil to Cyril, he haunted Bent's society, to the end that the danger, foreseen, might be crushed or turned aside. I thought the apprehension groundless. Bent continued to be inartistic, unconvincing, like a crude blur in charcoal. Moreover, the worst that the most malign testator can do is to leave his fortune to a benign corporation.

The Childe, however, studied Bent's wicked serpent of a brain with the birdlike, fluttering attention of fear. Every visit he made to Bent was patent the following day in his sour mood and truculent speech, conditions aggravated not a little by my unbelief. In vain I pictured Bent as a humor-

ous Giant Blunder-bore watching invisible over a herd of fattening Little Ones;—to Roland Elliot he was nothing humorous; and the temper, vocabulary and appetite of my friend suffered grievously thereby.

Appetite—the word suggests gastronomy, and a sweet happening of this period.

It was Betty's birthday; and, harkening ever to the whispers of profound Strategics, I gave her and her betrothed a Little Dinner at Lavenue's.

There, in his old Parisian days, the cigarettes of R. L. S. (that rare Little One) added its ghost to the pervading mistiness. That must have been in the crowded room below, where a chastened Bohemia gathers o' nights for its music and *consommation*. There, when your *demie blonde* stands beading on your table, when the red-tipped matches of France have done their reluctant work, and the air grows thick and the music comes down at nine o'clock from the *salon* above—there it is good for a Little One to

## 210 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

be and surpassingly good to remember in his exiled, un-Parised days.

But that room is for common evenings when one has already dined, *tant bien que mal*, and longs to herd in Bohemia with the unknown masters of the art to come. Betty's birthday, her betrothal (now "formally announced") and high Strategics, demanded another *mise en scène*, the white room above with the pale green trellis that hints somehow, to a Little One, of vagrant holidays and Italian *villeggiature*.

In this retreat, under the Arcadian influences of our trellis, we fed on gastronomic marvels that came veiled in exotic names. I had made a concordat (nothing less) with the *chef garçon* (born for the Vatican, but providentially deflected) that afternoon; and the dinner, thanks to him, became an æsthetic rite. He had put my suggestions blandly aside, had written the *menu* as it were a papal rescript, and ended, "And we

will finish, if monsieur pleases, with *Pêche cardinale*, a *spécialité* of the House."

Monsieur did please. Alone, upon the rescript, monsieur could foretaste the delights of *Pêche cardinale*.

"And we will drink," I said, trying to speak firmly, "*Vouvray mousseux*."

Consideration, pencil to lips—doubt—an indulgent smile—consent!

"*Bien, m'sieur*."

True, Little Ones, I think, are *gourmets* only by accident. Content and passing content with the fare of Omar, seeking no dietic complexities, they nevertheless accept the latter, if these happen along, as sparrows do crumbs, with gay twitterings. So my papal friend, watching our enjoyment with a pastoral smile, was content with his flock. When the *Pêche cardinale* appeared, he exhibited it himself to Betty and dispensed it like a benediction.

It was with the *Pêche cardinale*, or rather with its (may I say?) occultation, that

## 212 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

began the stress of the gathering, its tense emphasis.

Up to that moment our feast had been for us all a merry Nursery of an uncommon kind; though to me, perhaps, it had a subtler flavour than to the others, the gust of dainty Strategics.

Suppose yourself, Little Reader, seated at the next table on my left hand, playing with the bread-crumbs, sipping your wine and peering furtively to us-ward. You see a round *table de six couverts*, with a pale golden something beading in the glasses and deep golden chrysanthemums from the *Marché aux Fleurs*—rather Pruinesque than Bettesque, the colour-scheme, an effect intended for the eye of Roland Elliot, lover and artist. You see in profile Hugh Lyndon, strategist and master of the feast. On his left hand, Pruina! Her back is toward you, but her hair, even by electric light, is very good to look upon; though it sounds a

tenderer note of colour under the touch of the blond sunshine.

Next to her (this is Strategics!) sits that dear Childe, our Infant, Roland Elliot. You see his face, quartering from the right, a pale face now, its lines strengthened and dignified by suffering and intensest labour. A happy face tonight! and as it turns now and again to Pruina it catches, very beautifully, I think, something of the spiritual purity of hers. It is so, looking back to those days, that I love to remember it.

Then Aloys, that fervent, patient spirit. You will read him at once, if you can look below the gaunt, grey husk of the man, read him as the dweller amid voices and visions who, for the sake of those he loves, descends to share the mood and movement of their daily life. And, if you have an eye for the invisible, Little Reader, you will feel a certain inward stir, a sense of consecration, from having gazed on Aloys Guex-Bény.

Between him and the dark bulk of Hugh

Lyddon sit Cyril and Betty, both meshed, unknown to themselves, in viewless Strategics. He is whimsically altering the plan of Azay le Rideau into a Palace of joy for the Little Ones. The *projet*, as you see, pleases us.

You have now, if your fancy be of the helpful sort, a picture of the six Little Ones when they heard for the first time the strains of "La Brise du Rêve," what time the orchestra descended to expectant Bohemia and its place was taken (such is the custom at Lavenue's) by a pale magician with a violin and a darkly bearded assistant with a piano.

Watch the Little Ones now, you of the helpful fancy, as that pale magician tosses back his yellow hair, cuddles his violin under his chin and begins to play upon their heart-strings.

## XV

### LA BRISE DU RÊVE

WHEN this fantasia was first played at Queen's Hall it was called "Dream Zephyrs," a sticky-sweetness that has clung. It was given its French name when it was orchestrated for the Concert Colonne. But the Little Ones call it "Op. 5." It needs no title. It is simply—Itself.

The critics, vocative by vocation, dub it "programme music." Perhaps!—but if it be programme music, let me coin a verb and ask you, dear sirs, what it *prographs*?

No; the fantasia in E<sup>b</sup> is music, absolute music, a thing higher even than words.

Do not mistake me! I, Hugh Lyddon, apprentice of letters, love and reverence my own art. I worship its mechanism, its form,

## 216 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

as ends in themselves and strive mightily to make these vibrant and pure. For although I, a wistful, nonchalant Little One, warped by heredity, teased by environment, betrayed by instruction, can add no force of my own to the thought-rush of the world, yet I can, the least of us can, by patience and love, do something toward shaping the matrix that shall hold the final word of the ghost in man.

But I know that my art is a mediate art, a stuff of hints and indirections, a distant reflex of human emotions. Whereas music is emotion itself, bodiless and unconditioned.

Shut your eyes, surrender your petulant, febrile will, and ah! how it comes, this music! All the dark emptiness behind the eyes, all the hollow chambers within the ears, all the vague, blind dome that seems to house your soul, are fulfilled with harmony. There is no orchestra, no sound from without; the music is *within* you, begotten, ripened and born within you, and growing from

beauty into emotion (your own soul-beauty and your own soul-emotion) becomes You, triumphantly and significantly You. That is music!

Perhaps, especially if you are a poor word-monger like Hugh Lyddon, you may be stirred to speech when you open your eyes, awaking from music's internal reality (as it seems) into the shimmering, chattering external world. That is my excuse for trying to phrase the effect of *La Brise du Rêve* on me—that and my duty as Little Historian.

This then is what I heard and felt, what time the pale magician tossed back his yellow hair, cuddled his violin under his chin and began . . .

An ascending *roulade* that rose fountain-like, sprayed into clear, sunny drops that fell, with a half-heard, hinting minor into black, sleeping waters. I thought of the Luxembourg pond and of Pruina as she moved, ages ago, in the careless, unforesee-

## 218 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

ing day before *Strategics* was begotten, "through the ecstasy of Paris sunshine."

Another tinkling *roulade*, happy silver notes, but higher, higher, spraying into blown mist that dispersed through sighing minors into a trembling *diminuendo* . . .

And then it began! Wail on wail of sliding, rising sixths, troubling, calling, insistent; and my soul (already aching a little from *Strategics*) sobbed in answer. "Come," wailed the strings, "come and come and come! Leave that hungry, thirsty flesh-machine that you blundered into God knows how; leave your rhymes and reasons, your babbling philosophy, your fancies and phrases, and come to me. Me! that blows the vapour, and frosts the pane, and shakes the leafage, and images the fire air of the spirit. Come! Come with me!"

Wail on wail, ever rising, ever shriller and more beautifully compelling; and then a discordant, rending crash, a pang of separation, and my free soul was afloat.

The discord resolved (and with it all coveting ardours of earth and aching Strategics) into an uplifting atmosphere of harmony; and I moved drifting within it, bird-like. And it blew against me, this fine air, this quintessential music, tuning my soul (I grope for the phrase) with soft-fingering voices into unison with its spirit. And at last, when its work of love was done and I was quivering with every vibration without me, aiding with my whole being the universal symphony, I rose, up, up, on an echo of that first bubbling *roulade* and descended, struggling, unwilling, through fretful, sobbing minors, back to earth.

That is my little story of La Brise du Rêve. Others, wiser than I, have told it otherwise. Others, wiser still, have remained dumb, as all should remain, in the presence of the ineffable.

My eyes opened (I was surprised to find them shut) on Little Emotions. The Childe's head was in his hands, elbows on the table.

## 220 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Aloys, always moved by great music, raised his hands and made vague, unmeaning gestures. Betty was flagrantly weeping; and Pruina's eyes wandered from one face to another with a certain golden mastery.

Cyril, the impassive, the ever-practical, rose and stalked over to the musicians. The violinist, in answer to his question, tapped with his bow the manuscript sheet on the music-stand. Cyril stooped, read and returned. Impassive? Not now, with those wide eyes, that mouth a-quiver! He tried to speak, our ready Cyril, and no words came. Then, stuttering, he pointed a shaking finger at Pruina—and we understood!

Understood! as only Little Ones can understand; and we held out our arms, all of us, by some dumb, common instinct, toward that pure, singing spirit, that rare genius, our Little Pruina.

“And you like it so much, so much,” said she. “I am very happy.”

Her simple words relaxed the tense emo-

tions; and we fed her solemnly, as it were a sacrament, with the last bit of *Pêche cardinale*, and put a royal chrysanthemum in her hair, and coined tender Little Names for her and flamboyant titles. For her no Grand Croix, Nobel prize, or Prix de Rome—below her worth and work, all of them! For her a unique distinction, invented by our hierophant, the Grand Guerdon of Littlehood!

Then the magician and his pianist went down to Bohemia; and presently we heard, far away, faint echoes of those sliding minors and wailing sixths. As they ended, Bohemia spoke—spoke with its generous unreserve, with clappings and howls and eiffelesque enthusiasms. The magician was so be-kissed, I heard later, that he revealed in self-defense the secret that the *compositrice* was *en haut*.

“She is here,” went up a mighty shout. “Let her come!”

At this the Little Ones “saved them-

## 222 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

selves," hustling their genius away through twisting passages and out by the door that gives on the Rue du Départ.

What more of that night?

Little more—only the unsleeping eyes of Hugh Lyddon and his Machiavellian self-communings.

"He is a great genius," said he, "and she a great genius. The game is in my hands. He and she. She and he."

And so on, in wearying iteration, until he ached himself into tossing slumber.

## XVI

### FROST WORK

**T**HE horn of Les Avants recommences its echoing insistence; and memory sees four Little Ones listening to its calling on the heights. She sees them leave Paris early in January, pass their leafless Fontainebleau, slide by the spires of Dijon, and climb, amid the snow-laden Christmas firs on their slopes, the white valleys of the Juras. Then did our Aloys watch the mountain frost write on the car windows bizarre modernities for the Book; then did our Pruina prattle happily of her girlhood and New England winters. Then did the Childe put off his wan introspections and spin hyperbolic fancies; and Hugh Lyddon, that shaper of destinies, eclipsed his Machiavelli

## 224 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

in his traveling bag, which he snapped to, like the shears of Atropos, with a clash of finality. For he was content in a grim, gnawing, griping fashion of his own with the march of strategics. There is a crepitating pleasure in playing a great game even when it excruciates. Together now, both of his beloved puppets, on a stage befitting their drama; and the subtle threads were in his fingers.

For the Childe's presence in the snows was the harvest of sown hintings—strategic seeds, cast by Hugh, harrowed by Betty, and warmed by the blond sunshine of Pruina.

I find now, looking backward, a vague symbolism in our first sight of the Lake of Geneva. As our train skirted the shore between Lausanne and Montreux the lake was hidden in fog. On the morrow too, as we stood on the heights of Les Avants, all below us was grey vapour. A veil, not to be raised by cunningest strategics, lay over the

beauty we had hoped to find. But with the next day came a persuasive sun. By noon he had coaxed the fog into transparency; and we came into our own. Grammont, girdled by wisps of vapour, gloomed across the water; the Dent du Midi jagged white against the southern sky; and the peaked wings of the lake boats flashed agreeably in the sunshine.

“Little Lake,” sighed Pruina—“Little Lake.”

She had found the word. It was ours, Lac Léman, in the very aloofness of its appeal. Far away—the white Ideals of its crisp peaks; far away—the invisible brotherhood of mountain Aspirations behind them. And around us and them the flowing air, the creedless symbol of That which all who are Little Ones worship “in spirit and in truth.”

The reticent beauty of the cold heights had also to me a machinal interest. Here was that chilled misery of an Infant; here

was that genial sunshine of a Pruina; here they were vibrating electric together, charged by this great dynamo of nature, in the closed circuit of the hills. Something would happen! These alpine currents (aided by fine strategics), what might not be their output in fulfillment and joy. The hills and I. *En avant! Hardi, mes braves!*

Fortunately for my gigantic allies and me (for life needs some beer and skittles), there were Little Distractions. One could *luger*, for example, which is simply coasting translated into a social function for those of mature years. A sport invented for Little Ones, we joined in it madly; so that even now I have mad dreams of the vertiginous swirl of the sled round the banked curve at Les Avants.

Lugeing suggests (if the reader will forgive the latinism) a tibial digression. There existed in the last generation a stratum of society of abnormal anatomy. It had feet—"her feet beneath her petticoat, like little

mice stole in and out"—so much was patent. It had knees—proved by genuflection, the word and the pose—so much was conceded. But between the feet and the knees—nothing! Pink euphemisms clothed it. "Priscilla has fractured a limb," perhaps, leaving the literal mind a-quiver between a broken cherry bough and a white arm in splints. Or perchance it is a "lower extremity," thus bewitching the blushing hurt into a mere pedestrian ambiguity. Fancy the Ancient Mariner so bowdlerised: "Yea, slimy things did walk with lower extremities upon a slimy sea." That were an extremity indeed!

Well, we have changed all that; and at Les Avants, where all ages and both sexes shot, straddling bounding luges, down a peopled slope, this "nothing more than matter" became a Little Merriment.

It was generally extremely English, the extremity. "The nation that marches on those things," said the Childe, indicating a

## 228 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

scudding General, "need fear no Germans." It was titled, middle-class, lay and cleric. It affected brown puttees. It belonged to a cabinet minister; even, it was whispered, to a duchess. It assisted the poet, whose verses you know so well, to climb the slide. It guided, as he rocketed by (belly-whoppers, if you please), the course of a muscular bishop. There were, thank the playful gods, the feet of many Little Ones on the mountains! So much for the tibial digression.

One could also skii, vaingloriously, if one could; one could also skii, diffusing merri-ment, if one could not. I came one morning, after a strategic absence that I called work, on Pruina and the Infant. He was lying in the snow with his legs and the skiis tied in an extraordinary knot. She was standing with her back to him, some twenty feet away, trying in vain to turn *secundum artem*.

"Hugh," said he, "will you diagnose this knot?"

"It is," I answered, "either Shakespeare's 'self-figured knot' or a carrick bend."

"Will you kindly undo it without dislocating my legs or breaking a ski."

"No, Childe! So perfect a thing as that should be preserved inviolate. You shall remain here and become an icy petrification."

"Old ass!"

"Obloquy moves me not. *Au revoir!* I shall seek you at nightfall with remnants from the table d'hôte."

And I skied away to the top of a little hill whence I watched Pruina unbuckle her skiis and go to her comrade's rescue.

Observe, ye mountains, my master-game and play yours as well! It will not wail in your granite souls like the sliding minors of *La Brise du Rêve* . . .

Dear old Childe! Dear Pruina! . . .

While we lugged and skied, laughed, ached and played, Aloys read the mountain frost. "Fish skywards!" with its religious suggestion, is of this epoch; so also is that sweet

## 230 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

command, "Make thyself into a singing blossom."

These were very well, but greater was to follow. One morning Aloys (Strategics kept me much in his calm company) handed me a frost-script.

"There is nothing like it," he said, "in any Bible of any faith or in any philosophy. It's the final word of truth."

"Read it," I prayed.

"The kingliest word," he read, "the kingliest word in the Book is this: May a kinglier soon discrown me."

Whatever one believes as to the work of the frost, this proves, I think, that truth had descended among the Little Ones and that our good Aloys was its prophet.

## XVII

### STRATEGICS

**I**T is afternoon. We have come down by the electric railway to Vevey and stroll in the good winter sunshine under the leafless *platanes* along the Quai. The stone parapet is warm to the hand; the sun burns on the face; and the only snow in sight is cloaking those great allies that watch me with confederate interest from across the lake, the alps of the Valais and the hills of Savoy. May they find me worthy!

Destiny (*Le Destin, c'est moi!*) has decreed that Aloys should walk with the Childe, that I should walk with Pruina, and that an interval, exquisitely hesitating between aloofness and comradeship, should divide the groups. We walked, therefore,

## 232 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Pruina and I, in a sort of transparent cloister. Our voices did not pass beyond its walls. Only the hills bore witness.

Day after slow day, ever since the viper's bite at Fontainebleau—by hints, gestures, reticences innumerable—by underlining this and deleting that—by study of the poetic masters of the emotions—by grubbing (me miserable!) through modernest psychology—I had made Pruina and myself ready for this moment.

And it had come.

"You are doing good work," I began, nodding at the Infant's back, "you and the mountains."

"My collaborators," she answered, looking up at the Rochers de Naye, white against the blue, "have done it all."

"Not all," I said. "They image the cold heights; you give the sunny levels. He needs both, I think, poor fellow."

Pity is a degree to love, says Little Will.

Strategics, then, demands this mediate passion in Pruina.

“Aspiration and sympathy,” she said, as if she were translating my words.

“Sympathy,” I commented, “the word rings rather false. It means to suffer with, I suppose; and you are not precisely a fellow-victim. You can’t know his suffering unless you suffer or have suffered in the same way. No; we want some finer word.”

“Compassion?” she suggested.

“That’s just to passion with, or to suffer with.”

“Ruth?” said she.

“It is exact,” I admitted, rather grudgingly, “but the colour, the connotation, the fragrance—”

“There’s rue for you,” she quoted; “and here’s some for me.”

“I know; but Ophelia was mad; and a true Little Word must be romance. These icy northern dialects—Brr!”

“Then how will pity do?”

“Pity”—I pretended to hesitate—“that is near. ‘And Pity like a naked new-born babe’—You have it—a most dainty diminutive! Give him that, Pruina, and let the hills do the rest. You’ll find it easy; ‘for pitee renneth sone in gentil herte,’ says Little Geoffrey.”

“Not always,” she said, not looking at me, but watching the gulls circling expectantly along the shore. “Indeed, it is rather hard for a girl to think that a strong man needs pity for the loss of another girl. Suppose a baby breaks a toy—”

This would not do at all.

“You are right,” I broke in. “The man, perhaps, deserves no pity for the loss of the girl *qua* girl; but consider! How about the symbol, Little Pruina; how about the mystic symbol? He has knelt at a shrine, year by year; one day he finds the image shattered—”

“But Betty’s not shattered.”

“Right! I stumbled. He finds the image

gone, stolen, vanished; and the nerve between his yearning soul and the universal love is dead. That particular girl was the organ, the eye, whereby and wherethrough he saw the infinite. The eye gone, he gropes, he suffers, he is a blind man at the door of Love's temple; he is worthy of the alms of pity."

My words rang hollow. I felt clothed with inadequacy as with a motley coat.

Pruina's eyes, tawny dubieties, following the gull-swirls, showed no assenting light.

"A broken toy," she murmured.

"Take it so," I cried, suddenly inspired; "take it so if you will. Are we not Little Ones? A broken toy! A poor broken toy! The pity of it—Oh, the pity of it, Pruina!"

"I was wrong"—ah, the wet, brown light in the eyes now!—"Poor Little Roland; I am so sorry for him."

Victory!—of a sort. What an emotional process it is, this victory.

"Poor Little Roland," I echoed; "but—"

## 236 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

This was a strategic hesitation, that the designed transition of thought might have the initial emphasis of incompleteness.

"But," she prompted.

"But," I continued, "our duty does not end with pity for the Little One."

"What follows?"

"This, admiration and reverence for the Genius. Roland Elliot is a very great man!"

Brown deeps of wonder were opened on me.

"When you have seen *Les Ailes Rognées*," I said, "you will understand."

"A picture?"

"I am not betraying a Little Confidence," said I; "and yet—"

"And yet"—the wonder-light flickered into bright curiosity—"you are a Little Exasperation."

"Perhaps. Fate sometimes forces us, against our wills, into invidious reticences."

"When someone becomes polysyllabic,"

she remarked dreamily, "someone evades something."

This would never do. It is not strategics to babble of the vagaries of Someone.

"No; I am not evasive. I was playing a little on the doorstep of a pleasant subject. The literal fact is that Roland has painted a great picture."

"Soul or technique?"

"Both," said I. "Infinitely both. Tell me, what do you call the greatest picture in the world?"

"The—"

"Wait!" I cried; "this is an artistic crisis. The thing is impossible, but suppose!—suppose, Pruina, that our Little Tastes do not go on all fours!"

"Impossible! There is no choice. It is—"

"No; I prithee, no! Approach it by dainty steps, mincing steps. Let us respect this signal moment."

"There is a street," said she, her eyes re-

## 238 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

flective wells of reminiscence; "shall I tell its name?"

"No names, an you love me. There is a street—"

"A broad, fair street, sloping upwards."

"It must surely slope upwards."

"We reach a gateway in a brown wall—"

"An old, brown wall."

"A massive, brown gateway, deeply arched; and beyond—"

"That beyond!"

"Are meadows—"

"And trees, Pruina?"

"And solemn trees, ilexes, stonepines and cypresses. And old statues and temples and fountains. We turn to the right and walk under the pines over places worn bare by children's feet—"

"The playing feet of Little Ones."

"And we come to a building."

"Do we go in?"

"What else? We pay—"

"No; I insist on paying for both. What shall I pay, Pruina?"

"Two francs."

"Not francs," I cried; "you torture me! Not francs."

"Two lire then."

"Two lire, one for you and one for me. And then?"

"We go right to it."

"Looking at nothing else?"

"There is nothing else just then."

"And we find it, discover it all over again, and for some blind, blessed moments we cannot see it, or our fellow-worshipers, or each other."

Brown, wet light in those dear eyes again. Ah, Titian, mighty master, what a deathless Little Magic was thine!

"We are there," she said; "and now it is your turn. Tell me about the picture, Little Hugh."

My word! I had not foreseen this. Yet, could I but do it, our masterpiece might be

## 240 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

cunningly dovetailed into the strategic scheme of things.

“There are two processes of art,” I began, didactically. “One is to leave out what you don’t like. This is a sort of artistic cult of hate; and its disciples go through life hating more and more, leaving out more and more, and end by being great artists because they find so little to love.”

“You are a Little Exaggeration.”

“Of course I am. Exaggeration is only an awkward kangaroo leap toward an evasive truth. The other process of art is this—to master the whole sumptuous vocabulary of nature and use it to phrase your creed, your faith—I grope for the word—”

“Grope on, Little Hugh.”

“Your religion, whatever is highest and holiest. Art! what is it? What but the equation, stated in hard symbols, between what you think you see and what you know you feel.”

“Wait,” said Pruina.

I saw her lips form the words, one by one; and the happy things, in that rosy incarnation, became on a sudden beautifully significant. I was obliged to remind Hugh Lyndon, strategist, that his special science was not created to study rosy incarnations.

“*Allez!*” she commanded.

“I’m not sure that those words mean anything,” I said doubtfully. “What do you think?”

“Let’s hope for the best,” she answered.  
“*Allez!*”

“Then we may apply them to our picture. We see there the world that Titian thought he saw, through the aura of wealth, beauty, health and gentle culture in which he lived. We feel too the gracious calm, the opulent colour of his sea-dwelling Venetian soul. Well, what did he do? He used Selection, that choice tool of the spirit, and Antithesis, that engine of the mind, and he wrought a picture. A picture? No! it is a great moral scales, in which he balanced, one against the

## 242 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

other, the warring answers to the riddle of life. And in the fearlessness of his faith, he made both as beautiful as he saw them, as we ourselves see them. And what do we see? Two women seated on the edge of a carved marble basin. One, richly clothed, leans on a closed vessel, which she half covers with her flowing sleeve and her gloved hand. The other, giving her young beauty to the sunlight, holds up a censer whence rises a wavering fume of incense. What are these women, what do they hypostatize? Are they Having and Giving, Dogma and Freedom—”

“Or,” Pruina broke in, “a Grown-up and a Little One?”

“Who knows? They are themes in Titian’s symphony, themes that he develops until none can miss their inner meaning. By the one is shadow; by the other light. Here a broken hill; there a pleasant meadow. Here, on dark heights, a feudal castle hints of war and captivity; there, on the sea beyond the grove, a white sail beckons toward free ad-

venture. Even the sombre lines of the rough hillside and the prudish folds of the dress battle with the wan streakings of the far sky and the curves of the young limbs. What is in that guarded, covered vessel?—a creed? a cloistered selfishness? a frozen soul? Who knows? What is the scent of that incense that blows vanishing into space? Love? Life? Aspiration? Again, who knows! We are only sure that it all sings of the Here and the Beyond, of the World and Little-  
oneness.”

“What of the Cupid?” asked Pruina.

As if it were all the arrows in his quiver, the name martyred my heart. Now courage, strategic Hugh, and play the man!

“I am glad you asked the question,” I said doggedly; “for it brings us back to Les Ailes Rognées. The Childe has taken up the Cupid-theme where Titian left off. Titian gives Love no voice in his symphony. He sends him away, tells him not to bother; and poor Cupid, his vocation gone, dabbles

idly in the pool. Our great Infant has restated the riddle, giving Love his separate theme; and his picture, on my Little Honour, is worthy to hang beside the master's in the Villa Borghese."

*Io!* victory is mine. *Aïe!* but it aches, the victory. I see the admiration demanded by strategics in that dear, glowing face. Pity and admiration!—the time is ripe, and I shatter the cloister walls by a shout to the unconscious Childe.

He came toward us.

"Tell Little Pruina," I said, "about Les Ailes Rognées."

"Traitor!" he cried.

"The Pruina tempted me and I did tell," said I.

"Adam!" cried Pruina.

"As a temporarily unpopular person," I remarked, "I shall join Little Aloys yonder, buy some *petits pains* and feed the gulls. They also (*also*, if you please) squawk and jeer at their benefactors."

So saying, I left them and, at a strategic distance, fed the wheeling gulls that seemed, so white they flashed in the sunshine, to be detached fragments of my snowy confederates, the alps of the Valais and the hills of Savoy.

## XVIII

### VERACITIES

**T**HE Childe and I were sitting that evening in the parlour of the hotel. It was midnight. Pruina, pleading weariness, had left us early. Aloys was busy with the frost. Pair by pair, the putteed legs came in from moonlight lugeing, sank heavily into chairs, crossed and re-crossed themselves nervously, and at last took their blowsed and yawning owners up to bed. Finally, the episcopal gaiters bade us a sacerdotal good-night; and we were left alone.

“Do you remember,” began the Childe, in melancholy accents.

“I do not,” I answered firmly. “I am careful never to remember anything so hark-from-the-tomb-y as your voice predicts.”

“Our talk by the Fountain of the Médicis?” he continued, with a weary smile.

“Vaguely,” I answered; “we talked of goldfish.”

“Of love,” said he. “I remember nothing about goldfish.”

“Of goldfish,” said I. “I remember nothing about love.”

He looked at me with surprise.

“Are you telling the truth, Hugh?”

“No; I was occupied by my art. You must have observed the antithetic balance of your phrase and mine. Now Bain says—”

“Please be serious, old fellow. Sometimes your nonsense is amusing; but just now it hurts.”

“Forgive me, Childe! Yes; of course I remember every word we spoke. We did talk of love.”

“And of Betty.”

“And,” I forced my lips to add, “of Pruina.”

“Of love, Betty and Pruina. Hugh, I am very unhappy!”

O frustrate Strategics, why smilest thou, fatuous, on thine own defeat?

“The man,” I said severely, “that conceived and painted *Les Ailes Rognées* has no right to the minor emotions.”

“Minor emotions,” he sighed miserably, and then added irrelevantly, “I wish I could trust you for a plain statement of fact.”

“Anything I know—” I began urbanely, when he broke in with the following rude and astounding words.

“But,” said he, “you have become such a liar.”

Galileo’s “*E pur si muove*” must have had the same clang of conviction.

Thus, O Strategics, dost thou lead thy martyrs to the crass stake of plain-speaking!

While I was considering my answer, he added as an afterthought.

“And such an egregious ass.”

“I don’t mind playing ass to your Ba-

laam," I said; "and I'd much rather be egregious than not. But I don't like to be called a liar. True! I grant you that in the process of artistic selection, I may omit notes of jarring colour, just as you do when you paint. Also, I may get so drunk with the intoxication of a certain mood as to see the thoughts and things embraced by that mood doubled, wavering and eiffellesque. What else did you do, Mr. Artist, when you painted *Les Ailes Rognées*?"

"That was a matter of art," he said; "and what is art—"

"Art," I interjected, clutching the forelock of didactic opportunity, "is the equation, stated in hard symbols, between what you think you see and what you know you feel. Now which, I ask you, is the more sacred, the more inviolable thing—what you know you feel or what you think you see—the Mood, which is almost yourself, or the Fact, which is almost illusion? If my mood distorts my fact, *tant pis pour le fait*, say I."

## 250 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

"Then," he said slowly, with a rather Socratic accent, "your lies—"

"Pardon me, old man, but I have pled guilty to no vice so monosyllabic."

"Your selective exercises—"

"Much daintier."

"Only relate to facts."

"Only to facts." I assented carelessly, never thinking of logical consequences. These, says Huxley, can always take care of themselves.

"Then I may trust," he said, looking into my face, "anything you tell me as to your mood, your feelings?"

"Absolutely," said I, letting him read in my eyes the truth at least that springs from good intentions.

"Now," he continued, "let us go back to another conversation. I mean the talk we had after Betty was bitten by the adder. Do you remember it?"

"Petal by petal," said I, tasting in retrospect the bitter-sweet of that hour.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked suspiciously.

"Nothing much," I answered, "it was a metaphor—flowers of speech, you know."

"Old ass! Now, Hugh, toward the end of that conversation you made a statement as to your feelings. Was that statement true?"

"Be a bit more specific," said I, "lest there be misunderstandings, and you again see shadows in the white light of my truth."

"You said," he explained, exhibiting the up-wrinkled forehead of anxious inquiry, "that you no longer loved Pruina. Was that true?"

I was opening my mouth in reply, when he raised an arrestive hand.

"Wait," he commanded. "I want none of your verbal subtleties. Was that statement one of fact or one of feeling?"

Here was a fine net for a fluttering strategist!

"Let me think," I answered slowly, "that

## 252 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

statement (I remember it well) may have been a fact about a feeling. Or, on the other hand, it may have been a feeling about a fact. I really do not know, as I look backward into my memory, whether dear Little Pruina was a glorious fact, getting part of her glow and colour from my mood, or whether she was, for a time, the very mood itself. But, whatever she was, whatever my feeling was, I tell you this, in all solemnity, in all truth, on my Little Honour—”

At this point something happened in my soul, something that calls for a long parenthesis. I search memory for an image of that happening, that the reader may see it in some pictorial shape; and I find (saved by that magpie of a Mnemosyne)—a broken shard of coloured glass! Such iridescences lie round the feet of children only; for blanched age the paths are swept and—acromatic. If ever you have been a human, country child (God pity you, otherwise!) you shall have found such a fragment. A

jagged triangle or trapezium it was, whereof the watchful angel that had dropped it had ground and rounded the cutting edges to the use of little figures. Found, there came the cleaning of the thing, the scratching of the caked mud (what an educational angel it is!), the rubbing with frock or knickerbockers, the breathing on the glass with a long, warm, moist "Ha-a-a," a final polish, and then—a new earth! One eye shut tight and the other glazed with mystery, you gyrate in solemn joy, looking out on the glamoured landscape. You do not know it then, perhaps you may never know it; but (what a metaphysical angel it is!) you are illustrating filmiest philosophies and walking, a tiny peripatetic, with recondite abstractions—abstractions raised, if you please, by Kant on Plato's shoulders, by Schopenhauer on Kant's shoulders, to the *n*th degree of untouchability.

Thus you gyrate and stare for a long, long time, a whole minute perhaps, until it seems

## 254 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

as if the world had always been so colour-bewitched. Then, quite suddenly, you grow tired of the game, throw the glass away and find (what a wise psychologist of an angel it is!) that the world is far prettier in its everyday tints.

This reminiscence, you will recall, is but the foundation for a metaphor, something to image an abnormal mental change.

Consider! I began my answer to Roland's question as a strategist: I ended it as a mere babbler of truth. For months, ever since that vipered and petaled day at Fontainebleau, I had played a part; now the part was playing me! Then and since I had ached miserably with every seeming victory and glowed miserably with every defeat; now is neither ache nor glow, nought but the mild thrill of accurate self-expression. Have I capitulated to my own strategics? Have I been moved by the Great Player on some long diagonal of the chess-board of fate? Or have I, as when a child, ceased to stare

through my shard of rainbow? Who can say?

For the instant, as I write, the coloured glass theory underlines itself. Pruina, blond in the blond sunshine!—did I not see her and life and my own soul through that warm, amber phrase? Did I not worship the halo rather than the saint; the grail rather than the god? Perhaps—not a word of conviction, I know, yet—perhaps!

And then, following hard on aching strategies, come these austere whitenesses, these frozen aspirations, heights where even the warm life-breath fogs into grey symbolisms. No blond sunshine here, no surface illusion of colour; and yet—I know it now for the first time—these alps are mine, my own soul's home and not Pruina's. She is France, the France that treads the red vintage of nature's beauty, the glow, the flow, the intoxication, into the wine of art. And I, I am New England, witch-burning, puritan, aspiring, mystic New England, whose bleak

eye turns forever to the bleak soul within, whose ear, deaf to earthy music, listens painfully to the unechoing silences of God.

Words!—these sounding phrases mean only this—that for some feverish months I have been telling and living the truth without knowing it, that what I called strategics was an honest impulse, that my achings were affectations and my joys delusions, and that I loved nothing whatever save the Little Ones, my art and (let us tell all the truth) myself. Thus ends the long parenthesis, with—“Exit Strategics; Enter Truth.”

“On my Little Honour,” I repeated, rather dizzily conscious of my re-found veracity, “I am not in love with Pruina.”

He studied me earnestly.

“For the first time in months,” said he, smiling, “your eyes agree with your tongue. You think you are telling the truth.”

“Of course I am telling the truth,” said I, rather testily; “and I don’t like your this—

my-brother-was-lost-and-is-found fashion of speech and your welcome-O-Prodigal smile."

"Forgive me, old chap," he said humbly, "I mean no harm. God knows I have nothing to smile over."

"The man that conceived and painted *Les Ailes Rognées*," I began—

"Hugh," he interrupted dolefully, "I am very unhappy."

"Why, Childe Roland, why?"

"Because," came the astounding answer, "I am not nearly as unhappy as I ought to be!"

"O last regret," I quoted, "regret can die.—You eiffellesque old donkey, let it die!"

"But it won't die," he sighed.

"Then cherish it; make it live," I suggested experimentally.

"It won't quite live."

"Then"—but I had exhausted the alternatives; a sentiment must surely be either dead or alive.

"Infant," I recommenced, "you are illog-

ical. You refuse to obey the law of the excluded middle. You—”

“There’s a sort of war going on,” said he; “and I’m the field of battle. There’s an old trend of sentiment on one side, you know, memory of happy days, loyalty to one’s deepest emotions, and all that. And on the other—”

“What is the other?” I asked; for he seemed to need the shog of friendly curiosity.

“That’s just what I don’t know,” he answered. “It’s all a vagueness, a sort of warm, golden vagueness; and I am very, very miserable.”

“No; you’re not,” I contradicted. “A warm, golden vagueness doesn’t sound half bad. If I chanced to have a sentiment like that I shouldn’t let her make me sad.”

“Her?”

“It sounds somewhat feminine. No; I should bask in it, study it, beg it to grow concrete. In short, I should make it exceedingly welcome, and then await results.”

“Then besides the golden vagueness”—he evidently had not attended to my last homily —“there is a bothering phrase. You know how tunes haunt one sometimes. A phrase—I feel like an unutterable ass to talk like this—a phrase. Never mind what it is—”

“I do mind. Make a full confession, Infant.”

“Blond in the blond sunshine, it goes,” said he. “Utter rot! What the devil does it mean?”

“It is probably the battle-cry of your warm, golden vagueness,” I answered nonchalantly; but, O strategics, how my heart leaped for joy! “And a rather dainty bit of word music it is. Proceed with your other symptoms.”

“That is all; and I am a most miserable devil.”

“Let us sum up your troubles,” I said judicially. “If I have understood you aright, a blond vagueness has insinuated itself between you and the love you used to bear

## 260 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Betty, a love that your loyal conscience will not permit you to cherish, but which nevertheless it pains you to relinquish wholly. You are not sorrowing because you cannot marry Betty, but because you cannot take sorrow itself to wife."

"How clearly you put it."

"I put it clearly because I feel it emotionally. You don't love Betty; but you love the idea of loving her, and cling achingly to that idea."

"Achingly," he agreed.

"Achingly. Well, we have now diagnosed your trouble. It remains to dictate the cure."

He shook a doubting head.

"I can cure you," I said firmly, "if you will do just what I say."

"What do you say?"

"This; be a strategic Providence. Arrange things! Try, actively try, to help Cyril and Betty; help them; get them married—"

He moaned slightly.

“Encourage the golden vagueness; seek the blond sunshine; and you will be cured.”

“How do you know that if I get them married,” he began, wavering between doubt and the will to believe.

“By something very like experience,” I said.

“A strategic Providence,” he mused.

“Precisely.”

“I don’t see how.”

“The How will happen along, if you watch for it,” said I, rising with a yawn.

“Arrange things?” he questioned, rising also.

“By fine strategics. Good-night, Roland.”

“By strategics. Good-night, Hugh.”

And so we parted . . .

## XIX

### THE WILL

**I**N the morning of the following day, I found the Childe alone in the reading-room.

“How do you happen,” I asked, on seeing how he was occupied, “to have such a lot of letters.”

“Why,” he answered, “I quite forgot till the other day that such things existed. Then I wrote my *concièrge* to forward my mail. Behold the result, some of it four weeks old; and I want to go skating.”

“His Lordship won’t miss you,” I said—Roland had accidentally upset the bishop yesterday—“so be as industrious as your artistic nature will permit. I’ll wait for you.”

So I waited, reviewing in the light of day

the talk and thought of the dark hours. In the course of this review I saw again from a new angle the consecrated phrase, "Blond in the blond sunshine." Good Lord! Who can reckon after this with the dynamics of literary suggestion? Words are life itself; and nothing exists emotionally until it has been adequately phrased. Love, even love, perhaps is but a lyric phrase, uplifted on such music as *La Brise du Rêve* . . .

It was hereabouts in my meditation that the Childe began to swear, extemporising a Bach-like fugue of French oaths on a harmonious counterpoint of damns. I longed for the presence of the episcopal gaiters.

"An admirable composition," I said, after listening awhile, "but unenlightening."

"Cad Bent!" he cried, throwing me a letter. "Read that!"

"Infant," said I, "your eyes are scarlet, your face is a royal purple, and the veins on your temple are about to burst. Control your Little Emotions."

## 264 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Read!” he shouted; and I read as follows:

“DEAR ELLIOT:—I sail for New York tomorrow. The sea has its sharks and shoals, New York its typhoid and Tammany, even Paris its puritans and pharisees. My will, in case heaven claims me, is to be found in my desk, the *Louis Quinze*. To make sure that you will find it, dear puritan, and profit thereby, I enclose a copy.

“Yours,

“C. BENT.”

“There is no date,” I said.

“It is post-marked a month ago,” said Roland. “Read the will.”

This is what I read:

“In the Name of God, Amen:

“I, Cadwalader Bent, of New York, U.S.A., now residing in Paris, do make, publish and declare this to be my last will and testament:

“I give my collection of *La Rochfoucauld* to the *Bibliothèque Mazarine*.

“I give to Cyril Harley, student of architecture, my natural son by Margaret Harley, wife of my esteemed first cousin, Paul Harley, the sum of One hundred dollars and my paternal benediction.

“All the rest, residue and remainder of my estate, both real and personal, I give, devise and bequeath to my young friend, the gallant preserver of my life, Roland Elliot, artist, of Paris, whom I appoint as my sole executor.”

That was all, except for the formal ending and the attestation clause.

“Well, why don’t you swear?” asked Bent’s beneficiary, when I had finished.

“Anti-climax,” I gasped. “What does this clause about Cyril mean?”

“Why, Bent was engaged to be married to Cyril’s mother, who was a beautiful Baltimorean. I thought Cyril told you the story after he had written home for information as to Bent. No? Well, she found out what he was and gave him his *cong e*. Later she married Paul Harley, Cyril’s father; and Bent vowed vengeance on them both. He began by getting the grandfather’s fortune. I don’t know how; ancient claims or trusts or legal deviltries—and ends by trying to smirch her reputation.”

## 266 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

And the fugue recommenced.

“Does Bent seem real to you now,” asked the improviser savagely, interrupting himself; “does he seem a shadow, a figment of my imagination?”

Fugue — with guttural variations into German.

“He is fairly concrete,” I admitted, “but rather too hellish for real life.”

The word “hellish” started him on a scheme of eternal punishment that would have pleased Dante.

“Fiendish!” said I, when he became silent. “Just think of it! That infernal paper filed in the Surrogate’s Court, copied by the gloating press, repeated in the records, preserved from mischance, there for all the world to read, lying its way into men’s eyes and minds. It is devilish, Infant, just devilish.”

This theme, by way of finale, was executed prestissimo to a breathless close.

"There!" he panted. "That probably saved me an apoplexy. What shall we do?"

"Wait till Bent comes back and make him swallow that will," I suggested.

"And then kill him," added the ungrateful legatee ferociously.

"He deserves it," I granted; "but it is not regarded as etiquette. No; Bent shall live, frustrate and terrified, under our supervision. How will that do?"

"We'll supervise him with a rack and thumbscrew," he decided grimly.

"No," I said; "torture is contrary to the Constitution of the United States, which though obsolescent at home is still venerated by Americans abroad. No rack for Bent."

While we were playing with the subject, he was idly turning over his unopened mail.

"A note from old Cyril," he exclaimed, tearing it open. "What hieroglyphics! and all in telegraphese, as usual."

"What does he say?"

"We probably shall never know"—his eyes wandered down the page—"here's something about sailing."

"Is he sailing?"

"Lord knows! It's dated day before yesterday. I can read that much."

"Then the good fellow was extant on that date. That's something."

He was all wrinkled attention and pinched eyelids for some minutes, and then frightened me by a stertorous groan.

"Hugh," he cried, "Bent is dead."

It took two agitated Little Ones over half an hour to guess out Cyril's meaning. This is what we made of it:

"Cherbourg, Feb. 2.

"Sailing home ten minutes. Bent *a claqué*. A lawyer's letter. No will. *Il y a gras*. Shall claim *galette*. Marry April. Love,

"CYRIL."

Which may be translated that Bent having died intestate, his lawyer announced to

Cyril that he had fallen heir to a considerable estate, which he was going home to claim.

I laid a hand on Roland's shoulder.

"Didn't I predict last night that the How would happen along?"

"The How," he cried, springing up. "That will! Paris! That damned will!"—he dashed into the office of the hotel—"My bill! A timetable! A carriage! My valise!"

And he rushed upstairs.

The polite clerk raised questioning eyebrows and looked at me.

"No," I answered in excellent French, "Monsieur is not mad. Monsieur is only emotioned. What is the next train to Paris?"

"Monsieur may make his trunks and his adieux, *déjeuner*, smoke his cigarette and take the great express from Milan to Paris, where he will arrive at 22.55."

As the suave clerk predicted, so it suavely befell. At five minutes to eleven that evening, the Childe and I were back in Paris,

270 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

though my memory of our arrival is of the vaguest.

The Childe will explain why.

## XX

### BURGLARY

I AM Roland Elliot, artist-painter, as we say here.

My friend Hugh Lyddon has asked me to calendar (the word is his) certain Little Happenings.

Might I read what he had already written?  
I might not.

Would he give a *coup de pousse* to what I should write?

He would not.

Could he suggest a model that I might imitate?

He could. The *Odyssey*!

And that was all I could get. He obstinately himself, as we say here, to help me. I

## 272 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

shall get jolly well even with him for this!  
As follows:

Hail, goddess, grey-eyed daughter of cloud-gathering Zeus, and thou Saint Dismas (eyes and parentage unknown), patron saint of thieves!

Assist me, both!

With my rose-pink tongue (is that Homeric, Master Hugh?) I can make shift to speak winged words; but with my sable pen I burble blitheringly. Help me, Pallas!

With my flame-hued brush I can bedaub the shining canvas; but with the beamy jimmy I am all unskilled. Help me, Dismas!

I sing the fleece-white heights and the parting hand-clasps of the golden-eyed Pruina and the grey-browed Aloys. And she grew rosy-red and white again to mark our sweating haste, then glowed dawn-pure. I am a painter, I; and colour, that highest gift of the high gods, is mine to see. And as I see it, so it is and not otherwise.

Hugh Lyddon too was there, the god-like

poet, eagle-beaked, nut-brown, Olympian. And as he stood speaking winged farewells, of a verity, not since the days of great Odysseus has there lived a nobler man. And as I see him, so he is, and not otherwise.

I sing the towered Gare de Lyon and a Parisian night of wind-blown lamps and wheeling stars. The snake-like train clanked in; the curved-backed porters came; the folk-thronged ticket-gates are passed; and lo, our Paris! Then did the Olympian, bulking huge, part the surging throng as a ship with crooked keel the yeasty waves. We mount a panting chariot, pass the light-flashing Seine, and reach the dark portal of his heaven-scaling home. As the wolf mounts Ida's craggy heights, so we the five score and seven steps to his skiey chamber. We seize the beamy jimmy, and—and—and—

And!

There is something wrong! Pallas, the grey-eyed, balks at the jimmy and refuses to add epic dignity to crime. Dismas, who

## 274 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

did well by us on that dire night, seems ignorant of the rudiments of rhetoric.

Left helpless, therefore, on classic heights, I must come down. I am not (pray forgive me!) at home with Homer.

Getting down is the rub; to cease from the Bard and become the Childe!

Let me consider . . .

We painters have a trick whereby we make our pictures "hold together." We select a cloud, it may be pink, grey, lavender, or what you will; and we mix a lot of that colour on our palette. Some of us call this "soup." Well, by adding more or less of that soup to all the other colours we give an effect of unity to our picture.

Why, there are fellows that can paint a pig looking at a sunset so that both pig and sky are equally divine, equally lost in the glory of the light. And it is just "soup"—and genius!

Now, writers ought to have, perhaps they do have, some such trick; so that they could

combine any facts, sublime and grotesque, pathetic and humorous, and yet give the same general colour to their work. Some repeated twists of language, for example, or some pet adjectives, might make incongruities (pigs and sunsets) hold together. I offer the idea, with artistic generosity, to Master Hugh, and shall proceed during the remainder of this chapter to illustrate my meaning. As "soup," for example, I shall here and there use some Homeric adjective; Hugh shall often be the "god-like poet" (which will exasperate him); and the jimmy of L'Ombre-qui-passe shall continue to be the beamy jimmy.

I think that I am pretty well down from my epic flight by now, and may continue my story.

I pocketed the beamy jimmy—a sectional tool which unscrewed into three pieces—and the god-like poet donned a huge Latin Quarter cloak, a slouch hat and a great black beard, the relic of a dramatic Nursery. We

## 276 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

hesitated when we saw standing on the mantel the mysterious Bottle of L'Ombrequi-passe.

"We might try it on Bent's concière," said Hugh, his eyes sparkling with romantic anticipation.

"We might not," I answered; "we will stick tight to the plan we've made. It's quite risky enough as it is."

Every detail of our crime, I may note, had been worked out during the journey.

Then we legged it!—legged it down stairs, across the river, and to the cab-stand over against the Madeleine.

There we hired a *sapin*. The driver (surely the gods were with us!) was far gone in drink.

We drove up the Boulevard Malesherbes, passed Bent's apartment, and left the cab in a side street named after Fortuny, a painter like myself. His colour-sense—but I must (though it is mighty hard) stick to my tale of felony.

I left my shoes in the cab.

We walked to Bent's door.

Where the god-like poet rang the clanging bell!

"Childe Roland to the dark tower came," he whispered.

Now a French apartment, gentle reader, is guarded day and night by a Cerberus of a *concièrge*. He sleeps in a kennel near the street door; and, when your ringing has at last awakened him, he pulls a cord (*cordon*) which springs the latch. When you enter he eyes you from his restless bed through a little unglazed window, which commands (in Bent's apartment) only your head and shoulders.

I knew that window; that was our advantage.

But Cerberus knew me; that was the rub.

Hugh rings; and on the seventh clanging the latch clicks.

We enter . . .

But we enter as one! I hold fast by the

Olympian waist; my head is under the Olympian cloak; my legs (viewless to Cerberus) keep lock-step with the Olympian staggers.

For the god-like poet is drunk. Very.

He reels, we reel, to the little window, which the great hat, tremendous beard, and mighty shoulders covered completely.

“*Bon soir*, magnificent Pierre,” he said, in the drunkenest French I ever heard, “O superb, vigilant and remarkable Pierre, *bon soir!*”

“I’m not Pierre,” growled Cerberus. “You’re in the wrong house. Search elsewhere, *pochard*. Get along.”

Under cover of the Olympian wails, I slipped from under the cloak and stole to the landing of the stairway.

“Thou art not Pierre?” rose the tearful voice. “Thou art not that man, so loved, so honoured, so extraordinary? And I”—the voice moved toward the door—“am not *chez moi*. I am drunk? O the suspicion unjust!

And I am banished with curses loud"—this was quite true—"into the night profound. *Hélas! Hélas!*"

And the street door clashed to . . .

I had to wait on that landing till the concierge snored.

I waited for æons.

When at last he began, he was amazing. Cerberus, all three heads at once, could have done no better.

Then, stocking-footed, I mounted.

My spine! I never knew where it lived before. It crinkled. Through its whole length, it crinkled.

Also, there was goose-flesh. Universally.

I reached Bent's door, second floor, front, chilled through.

I screwed the beamy jimmy together, sweating generously.

It was slippery with sweat when I jammed it into the crack of Bent's door.

Then, as I applied pressure, my fear

## 280 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

passed. I wonder if professionals feel that way?

More pressure . . .

Brave little jimmy! There is a crack, a splintering, and the door is open.

I listen. Cerberus snores below.

I slip in, close the door and light a match.

The air is dead. It smells of velvet curtains, morocco, old cigars and malignant thoughts.

I am not afraid of Bent or his damned old ghost either.

I draw a curtain aside and open a window. The god-like poet, watching below, looks up and nods. Jove-like.

I close the curtain and light a candle.

One small flame makes many shadows . . .

Bent is dead ("*a claqué*," wrote Cyril) and has gone to his own place. The shadows are merely effects of chiaroscuro. No painter is afraid of mere effects of chiaroscuro.

To work, Roland Elliot!

The desk—I have often admired it—is a superb Louis Quinze.

It is locked.

More work—light labour this time—for the beamy jimmy.

I pull open the drawers . . .

Here it is!—a long blue envelope, sealed with red wax, addressed to me.

I tear it open—the Will!

Pinned to one corner is a slip of paper. “Ah, Elliot,” it reads, “I knew on whom to reckon!”

Did you know, Cad Bent? I only hope you are watching and know what a silly fool you were. That will be damnation enough!

I compare the will with the copy he sent me. Correct!

I take a Sèvres bowl—a beauty—to the fireplace and burn therein both will and copy.

Bent—fool!—are you watching?

## 282 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

I crumple the ashes; I make them as dust  
with my fingers.

Behold the ashes, fool!

I take the bowl to the window, blow out  
the candle, draw the curtain and look out.

The Olympian greets me, god-like.

I invert the bowl—are you watching, fool?  
—and the ashes of villainy blow off into  
night.

My Little Chore is done!

I close the window and the curtain, light  
a match, find, unscrew and pocket the beamy  
jimmy.

Then, after making the door fast with a  
splinter of wood, I steal down stairs to the  
landing and wait.

Now, it is quite as hard to get out of an  
*appartement* as to get in. One can no more  
open the door from the inside than from  
the outside. Cerberus, in either case, must  
pull the sacred cord.

The lawful outgoer tramps downstairs,

shouts "*Cordon, s'il vous plait,*" and is allowed to pass.

I am not a lawful outgoer.

Item, my legs, now that safety is near, are trembling violently.

Steady, Roland Elliot!

An old verse comes into my mind: "The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in."

I hope so, indeed!

Would that be compounding a felony?

I wish Hugh would ring . . .

He does, clang on clang. Drunkenly.

The latch clicks.

He reels in.

"I am a lost man," he whimpers. "I search everywhere; I draw a thousand bells; I awaken all the world. Concièrges innumerable have cursed me. *A moi, magnificent Pierre!*—Harken, while I sing to thee the horrors inexorable of the night profound."

And he sang, quavering, "*Au clair de la*

*lune, mon ami Pierrot,*” until the song was lost in the roars of Cerberus.

By that time we were both outside the door, which we pulled to and then walked quietly away. At the corner of the Rue Fortuny that emotional old Hugh flung his great arm around my shoulders.

“Well done, you!” said he. “By God, it was eiffellesque!”

And wiped his eyes, the sentimental Olympian! . . .

Our driver had got into his cab and was sleeping. Stertorously.

No shaking could arouse him.

“Give me his hat,” said the god-like Imperturbable. “I’ll drive.”

He drove through Les Ternes, passed the Arc de l’Etoile, followed the Champs Elysées and the Avenue d’Antin to the Pont des Invalides.

Here, the innocent aids to our crime, the beard and the beamy jimmy, were thrown into the Seine. Will the latter reappear as

a Gallo-Roman bronze at the astonished Musée Carnavalet?

Thence Hugh, the Olympian charioteer, followed the Quai d'Orsay and the Boulevard St. Germain to the Rue du Bac. At this point, where the monument to Chappe holds out its telegraphic arms, our cab was hit by a taxi-auto and overturned.

Some time passed before I was released by two *agents* from under the sleeping bulk of the fat *cocher*. The old *peine forte et dure* must have been something like it; and when I was stood on my pins I felt a bit dizzy and uncertain.

"All the world drunk?" asked an *agent*.

As that seemed an unfeltonious theory, I stammered an assent.

"Anglais?"

Patriotism called for no denial; so I was silent.

Then I saw Hugh, my senses came back, and I managed to stagger to the sidewalk where they had placed him.

## 286 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

He lay on his back, unconscious, hardly breathing.

“His address?” asked the *agent*.

I just managed to give it before I fainted . . .

Some bad weeks followed.

Hugh had pitched on his head; and there was fever, delirium and anxious weighings of the chances of life.

His superb physique pulled him through.

Our executive Betty organized us into a corps of nurses; and we had a grand Little Fight with death.

I said that there was delirium.

There was!

And it had consequences—Our Hugh talked . . .

One day, when Betty and I were watching him, he told the whole story of Bent's will and the burglary. He is naturally fluent; but on this theme he was really eloquent. Had Betty not been present, I should have enjoyed it; but as it was—

*diab!e!* She wept bitterly and most unprofessionally because we had been so good to her Cyril; and I had a blamed uncomfortable time of it. Hugh, at that moment, was the lucky dog.

It was he, though, that rescued me at last. Just when Betty was sobbing hardest on my shoulder and saying her foolishest things, Hugh began to laugh. Betty stopped sobbing, and I stopped protesting, and we listened.

“Strategics,” said Hugh.

And laughed.

An Olympian laugh!

Then “Strategics” again; and laughed.

And so on, alternating, *ad infinitum*.

I think, what with his idiotic “strategics” and his laughter, that Hugh had, on the whole, rather a pleasant delirium. Humour, and the habit of never being afraid of anything, help one through the dark places of life.

About two days before he (as the saying

is) came to himself, however, there was a change. "Strategics" ceased, and with it, laughter.

And Hugh began to sing! The exclamation-point belongs there; for Hugh cannot sing. Moreover he was, temporarily, nearly stone deaf. Indeed, I have heard him argue that his intense love of music is his purest passion, in that music does not return his affection. However that may be, his fevered flights of song were excruciating.

And *La Brise du Rêve*, too!

He would hum the three opening bars—that at least was his intention—then stop and smile contentedly. Then repeat the effort with an added bar, and smile beatifically. And so on, ever mastering (as he thought) a new bar, ever growing divinely happier.

And he was divinely happy. I, Roland Elliot, painter, know the face of man; and as I see it so it is and not otherwise. He was divinely happy.

Thus, with thanks to the grey-eyed goddess, to Saint Dismas, good at need, and all those truly gentle readers who carp not at an unskilled pen—thus endeth Roland Elliot.

## XXI.

### SUB SILENTIO

I SEEK in vain for the informing phrase; language is one vast inadequacy. With the words of swordsmen and ploughmen we must needs envisage the meshed tenuities of the soul. Oh, for a new Pentecost; the rushing, mighty wind; the cloven tongues of utterance!

I have such things to say . . . .

Delirium—a ploughman's word! How it roots in earth!—*de*, meaning “from,” and *lira*, meaning “furrow.” The wit has strayed from the furrow—that is delirium, a sorry, clod-scented image of the mystic retirement of the soul into haunted subjectivities.

What can the man of visions, the youth of

dreams, do with such tools? His stuttering best?—So be it.

The furrow . . .

When I came back into the furrow, when the foolish partition between the Me and the Not Me rebuilt itself, I became a Little Interrogation.

My room?—perhaps. There was the “Suonatore,” Bellini’s Little One; the tapestry copied from that of Bayeux; the blue pennon with the Y; the masks and foils. There on the mantel was the Florentine lady; the matches and cigarettes and an unfamiliar group of medicine bottles at one end; and at the other, meticulously segregated, the lonely Bottle of L’Ombre-qui-passe. It carried conviction, the Bottle—I was in my own room.

But why? Why does Aloys, smiling gravely, lean against the mantel and watch me? Why does Roland—“Holloa, Infant!”—move wordless lips and watch me? Why does Betty—“Holloa, Bettine!”—in a

## 292 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

nurse's dress and cap, wipe her blue eyes and watch me? A nurse—have I been ill?

My hands (be scientific, Hugh!) will answer that question. The left (for the other seems paralysed) is white and thin. It would make but sorry work with an oar. It could not "rough-house poor old Harvard" now. Argal (ah, that good Shakespeare!), I have been ill.

The right hand (science, Hugh!) will not stir. Why? Shall I ask those fatuous mutes that smile and watch me, those Little Dumbnesses? I shall.

"Why?" I ask, rolling my eyes to each in turn. "Why?"

They move their smiling lips, pantomimic. Hamlet comes into my mind: "That are but mutes and audience to this act." They must deem it amusing, I suppose. Not so I. "Oh, reform it altogether," says Hamlet. Change it!—a mutation of mutism, I pray you. There is a quirk of wit in that, if one could phrase it. I can't; wit and hand are

alike—what is the word?—debile, extenuate, sapless.

My hand—science, Hugh Lyddon!—If I should roll my head to the right? This must be pondered; for the head is ponderous. I shall ask the mutes.

“If,” I say; and they smile, gesture, and move their exasperating lips. “Mutate, ye mutes;” is what I wish to say; but articulation shies.

They nod; that (as the dear French say) is already something, is already great-thing. I shall, hours hence, rotate my poll to rightward. Poll—the finical wordlet! “All flaxen was his poll”—That poor Ophelia!—But my poll is sable—“It was, as I have seen it in his life, a sable, silvered.” Not silvered, mine, unless from the snows of Les Avants. How is it, white left hand? Is my poll a Dent de Jaman, snowy-crowned? The chill (so whispers searching science) makes me fear it . . .

It is not snow; cloth rather. Cold it is

## 294 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

and of a humidity! A turban, forsooth—  
“an you be not turned Turk, there’s no more  
sailing by the star.” “Base Phrygian Turk,”  
turbaned with congelation. And cold to the  
poll (so argues science) spells fever. “After  
life’s fitful fever he sleeps well.”

But I have slept ill, I think, babbling,  
laughing, singing, groping, “following dark-  
ness like a dream.” Shakespeare!—how he  
comes, that Little Will, as the guerdon of  
much weeping—

*Aimerais-tu les fleurs, les près et la verdure,  
Les sonnets de Pétrarque et le chant des oiseaux,  
Michel-Ange et les arts, Shakespeare et la nature,  
Si tu n’y retrouvais quelques anciens sanglots?*

A few old sobs, *pardieu!* and then—Pe-  
trarch, Michael-Angelo and Shakespeare;  
flowers, fields and the song of birds. Any-  
thing more?—

Something more, I think. What is it?  
I would fain ask ye an I could, ye uncom-  
municating mouters! Aloys Guex-Bény,  
you at least, grey-haired and gaunt, perfect

lover of the viewless dead, should know. What is it, Aloys? My eyes to yours; your eyes to mine—so! What is it, grey-one?

You point, smiling, with a slow grand gesture. To my right, dear Aloys? So be it—my turbaned poll shall rotate to rightward, an it may.

It is done. The world must turn far faciler or it had stopped langsyne.

My hand at last; but hidden all in sunny tangles and trembling warmth.

Pruina? Pruina? . . .

Is this the thing I lack, this most desirable sunlight? Wait, Hugh; be scientific still. Wait!

Pruina? Pruina? . . .

“Blond in the blond sunshine”—is it that? There is a struggle in my soul, a wrenching . . . I am near, near . . .

Pruina? Pruina? . . .

“Blond in the blond sunshine.” Ha! that was Roland’s phrase, not mine.

Pruina? Pruina? . . .

296 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

She lifts her golden face, tear-stained and glowing . . .

No, dear God, it was Roland's phrase, not mine, not mine.

"Roland!" I call. "Roland!"

He comes and stands beside the kneeling Pruina.

His lips move. Good lack, another mouther! But I understand; how well I understand . . .

A few old sobs, *pardieu!* and then—Petrarch, Michael-Angelo and Shakespeare; flowers, fields and the song of birds. Anything more?

Ay—Strategics!

How well I understand. I look at him. I look at her. Strategics!

"Is it all right, you two?" I whisper.

He nods, radiant.

She nods, rose-red.

Strength, their strength, flowed rioting into my heart. With that shaking right

hand I found hers, found his, and put them together.

“God bless you both,” said I and looked at the others joyfully.

Delight touched their faces like sunshine; their rapid lips were voluble with unsounding words; Betty clapped glad, silent hands; and Aloys, in a mighty gesture like a benediction, swept from the mantel the Bottle of L’Ombre-qui-passe.

It made no sound when it fell . . .

Fifteen seconds, it could not have been longer, sufficed for what followed.

I saw Aloys reel, clutch at the chimney-piece, and fall full length like a forest tree.

The Infant started with a rush, no doubt to open the window, pitched forward and was caught by the arm of my reading chair, over which he hung limply, face downward, like a long, black bolster.

Betty sank in a huddled heap, wavered, rolled over and became a crumpled bunch of blue.

298 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

Pruina slipped to the floor, still clutching my hand, put her golden face against it and fell asleep . . .

What is happening?—

Ages ago!—There was a pale magician then, who tossed back yellow hair, cuddled his violin under his chin and played on the stretched strings of my heart.

How they ached afterward, until now, Pruina! Pruina!

And is he playing still, playing eternally, the pale magician? Who but he could play that air upon my quivering soul . . .

An ascending *roulade* that rises fountain-like, sprays into clear, sunny drops that fall, with a half-heard, hinting minor, into black, voiceless waters.

Your music, Pruina *mia*.

Music, dear God? Ah, no; it is not music. It is I.

It is I myself, the very soul of me, that leaps in fancy sunward, plays in the large

air, sinks sobbing back again into this sleeping flesh . . .

Ages ago!—There was a pale magician then, who tossed back yellow hair, cuddled his violin under his chin and played on the trembling strings of my soul.

How they agonized afterward, until now, Pruina! Pruina!

And is he playing still, playing down the ecstatic centuries, the pale magician? Surely, none but he has mastery of the tortured chords of the soul.

That air, dear God!—that o’ermastering air! . . .

Another tinkling *roulade*, happy silver notes, but higher, higher, spraying into blown mist that disperses through sighing minors into a trembling *diminuendo*.

Your music, dear Pruina!

Music? No, thou Wonder; it is not music. It is I.

It is I myself, the purest soul of me, that breaks, ecstatic silver, in the high airs of

### 300 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

the Spirit; I myself that blows, a vaporous mist, out into trembling expectancies, into infinite aspirations. . . .

Ages ago!—There was a mighty magician then, who tossed back lambent hair, clutched the great earth in his hands, and played on the blond chords of the sunshine, played the Call of the Spirit.

Then, I did not know the name of the air he played. Now, I know . . . .

“Come,” wail the sliding sixths, “come and come and come! Leave that hungry, thirsty flesh-machine you blundered into God knows how; leave your rhymes and reasons, your babbling philosophy, your fancies and phrases; leave all but the love that taught you how to hear my call; and come to me! Me!—the Ghost that quickens the flesh, the Thought that kneads the clay, the Love wherein all lives and thoughts and loves are One. Come to me!”

Your music, my love, soul of my soul,  
Pruina!

Music?—No; it is We, beyond all utterance, Ourselves!

It is We that answer, wail on yearning wail, to that spirit call. It is We that rise, with a discordant, rending cry, from our sleeping clay . . .

Pruina! Pruina! . . .

One and twain, twain and one, will-wafted through the blond chords of the sunshine. . .

Thy sunshine, far Orient of Love . . . that brightens, vista by vista, up to the Unchanging Light . . . that fades through glimmering twilights back to the wan Parisian day . . . that glows itself into that frail right hand of mine, hidden all in sunny tangles and trembling warmth.

## POSTLUDE

. . . Days, weeks, months after (what does Time matter? that striding greybeard is no Little One), there came an instant when I made an end of reading the foregoing chronicle to Pruina, laid down my manuscript and looked anxiously at that golden but inexorable critic.

“That’s all,” said I.

She went to the piano (she loves a parable, that Pruina!), struck a chord and looked a masterful question to me-ward.

“The tonic,” I answered. Pruina is teaching me harmony.

Another chord—

“The dominant-seventh,” I said proudly; “and to reward me move your head into that pleasant slant of sunlight.”

Another—

“The tonic again—and the sub-dominant; and the dominant-seventh once more—”

Pruina paused.

“Which will surely be followed, my dear Pruina, by the tonic. Why?—Because you are by way of creating an Authentic Cadence!”—this in tones of not unnatural vain-glory.

But that Pruina wrecked my prophecy. She played the dominant-seventh again and again, clashing it madly, until my exasperated ears ached for the closing chord.

“Resolve it!” I cried, technical even in my agony. “Resolve it, an you love me!”

She left the piano, left that unhappy chord shrieking for resolution, came over to me, and tapped my manuscript with an allegorical finger.

“Another dominant-seventh?” I asked humbly.

She nodded and put her arm round my neck.

"Suppose," said she.

"Continue to suppose," said I; "it is a most sweet hypothesis."

"Suppose that there had been no vision, no Bottle of L'Ombre-qui-passe?"

"In that case," I answered, sliding into the jesting-earnest of my aching days, "Strategics, which had already conquered my fancy for one standing so beautifully blond in the blond sunshine—"

"You should have heard what you said in your fever," cooed Pruina happily.

"—and the Infant's fancy for Betty, would have surely wrought its perfected work; and (although immortal fame and Pruina together are beyond the deserts of any mortal man) you and he would at last—"

"You really *should* have heard yourself," murmured that irrelevant Pruina.

"My reason for this belief is written in the Book," I went on, all earnest now. "*From the love that wants, it says, to the love that*

*loves—rise, thou Lover!* Now, the love that wants is of the earth, earthly, and may be moulded and shattered by sublime Strategies; but the love that loves is of the ghost, ghostly, and has no master save the Eternal. Such is our love, my own—a love that has seen the other side of the rainbow”—she nestled close in my arms—“that has touched in united vision the white fringes of the Ineffable Presence; that throws over all the passions and joys and fears of life a luminous shadow of the Shekinah. This earth shall pass, the blond sunshine shall fade, but love like ours, shining in the grail of divine experience, shall glow unchanging for evermore.”

“The Authentic Cadence,” said Pruina; and she left my arms, went to the piano, and resolved that waiting seventh into the closing chord.

I followed. The piano, just then, seemed very far away.

## 306 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

“Dear,” I said, when she was in my arms again, “why did this blessedness come to us, out of all the world?”

“Because we are Little Ones,” said Pruina; “nothing else really matters.”

**THE END.**







University of California  
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY  
Return this material to the library  
from which it was borrowed.

REC'D LD-URE

OCT 11 1988  
JAN 17 1989

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**A** 000 127 056 0

U